LONE WOLF AND CUB

子連れ狼

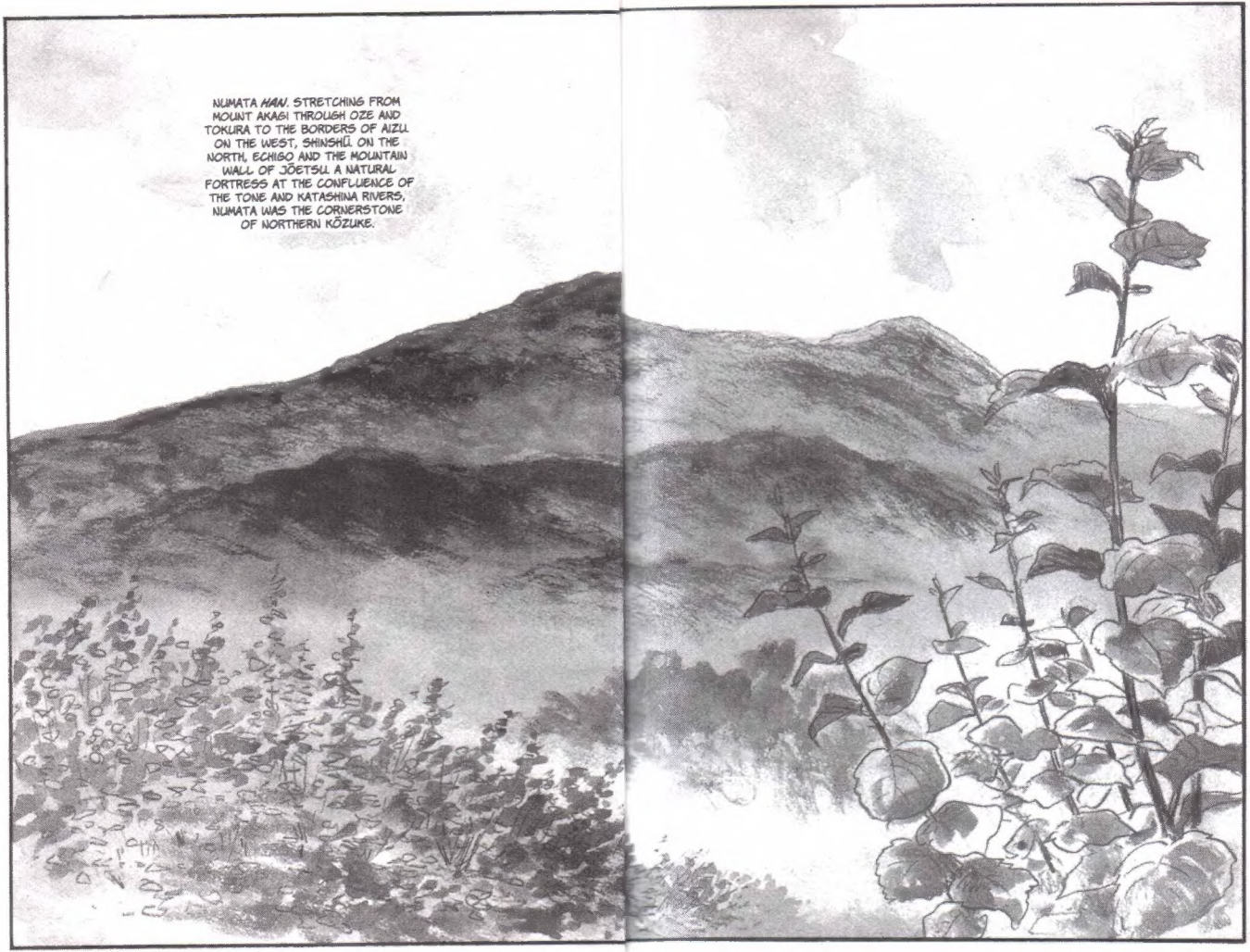
VOLUME 26

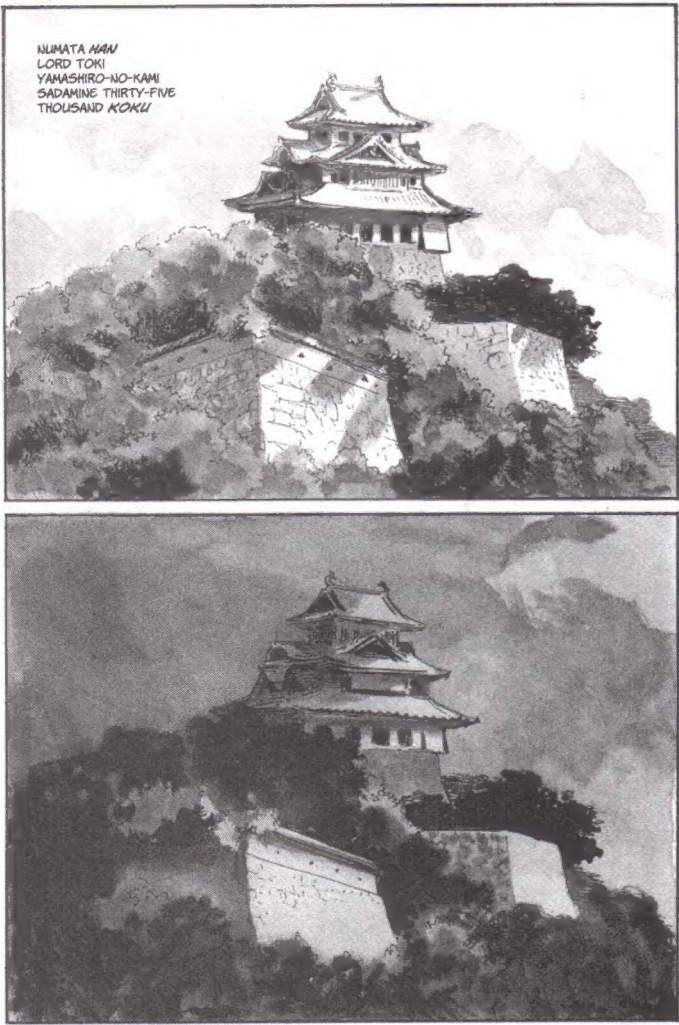
STRUGGLE IN THE DARK

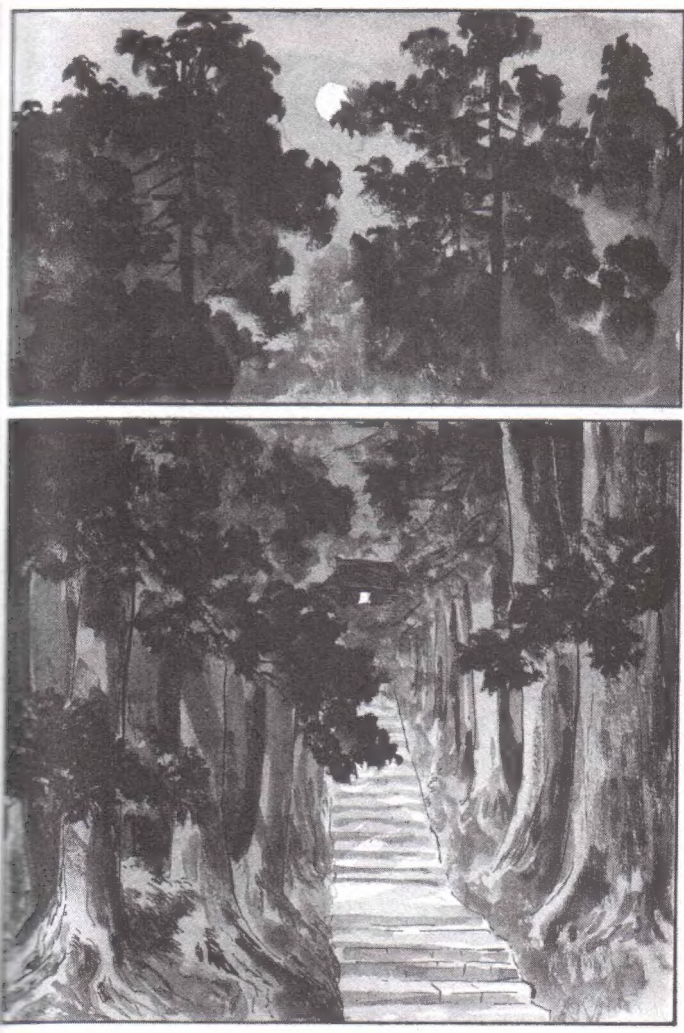
By KAZUO KOIKE
& GOSEKI KOJIMA

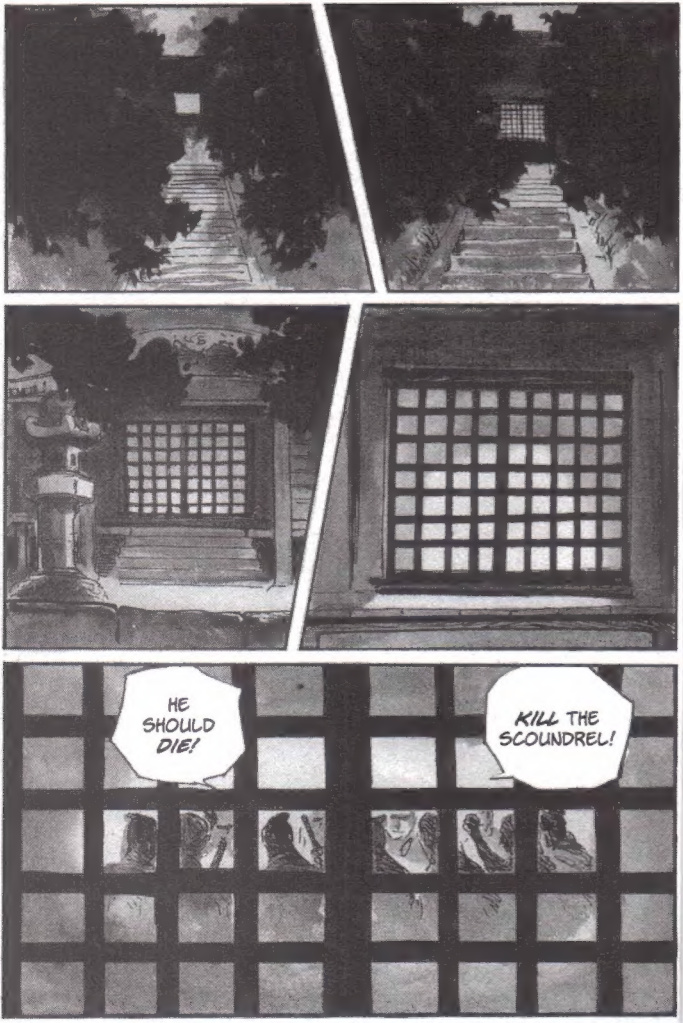
the hundred and twenty-eighth

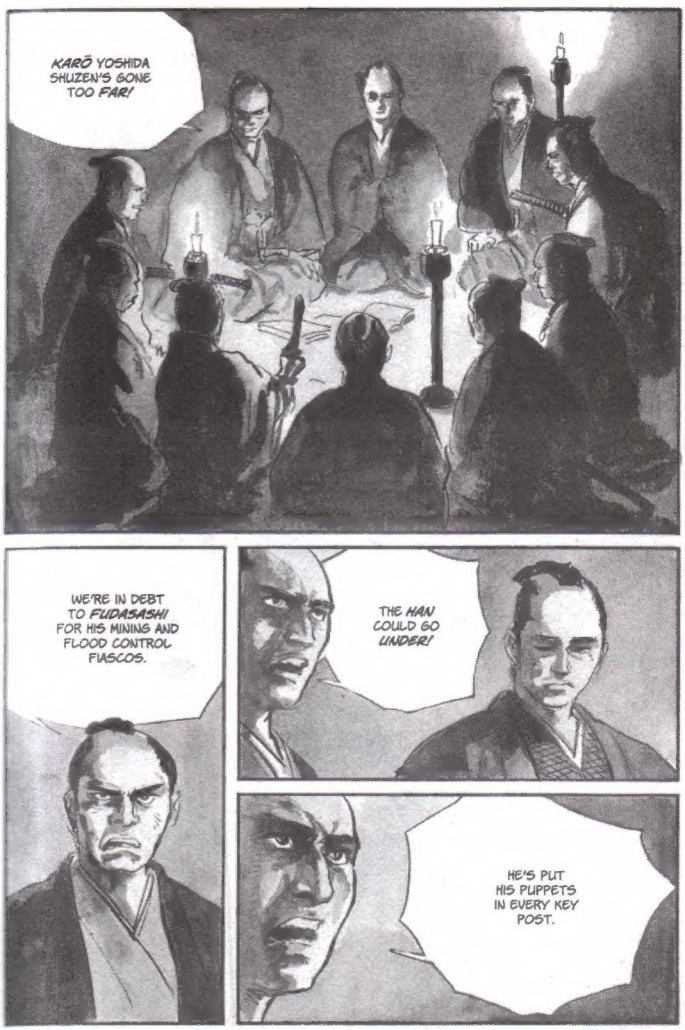
Tales of the Grass: Nindō Ukon


NUMATA *HAN*, STRETCHING FROM MOUNT AKAGI THROUGH OZE AND TOKURA TO THE BORDERS OF AIZU ON THE WEST, SHINSHŪ ON THE NORTH, ECHIGO AND THE MOUNTAIN WALL OF JŌETSU, A NATURAL FORTRESS AT THE CONFLUENCE OF THE TONE AND KATASHINA RIVERS, NUMATA WAS THE CORNERSTONE OF NORTHERN KŌZUKE.

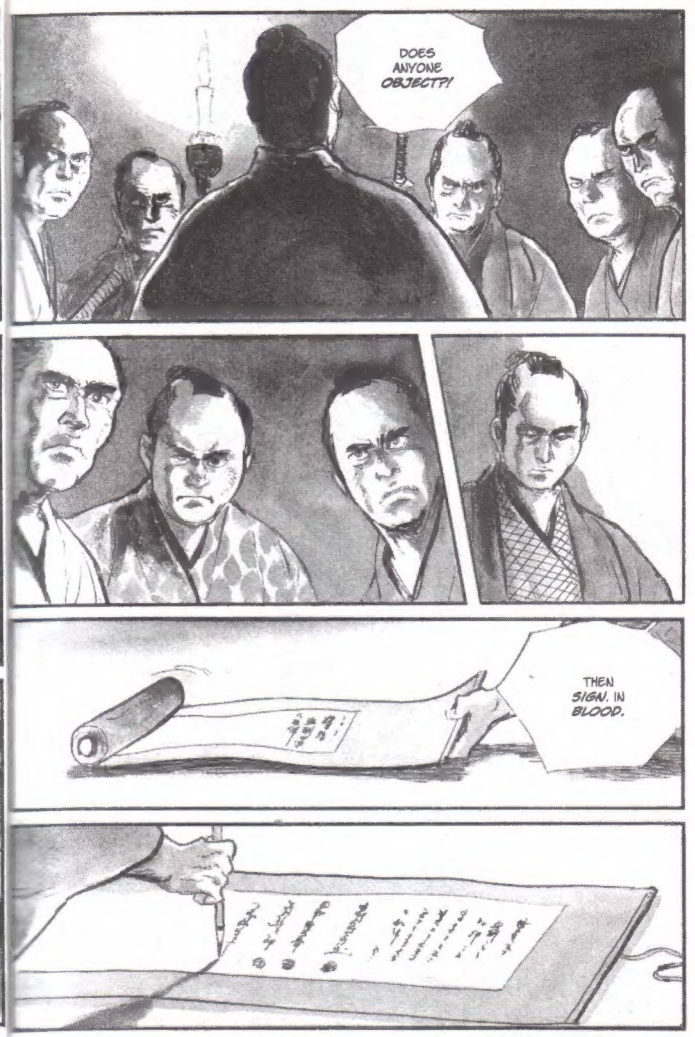

NUMATA *HAN*
LORD TOKI
YAMASHIRO-NO-KAMI
SADAMINE THIRTY-FIVE
THOUSAND *KOKU*

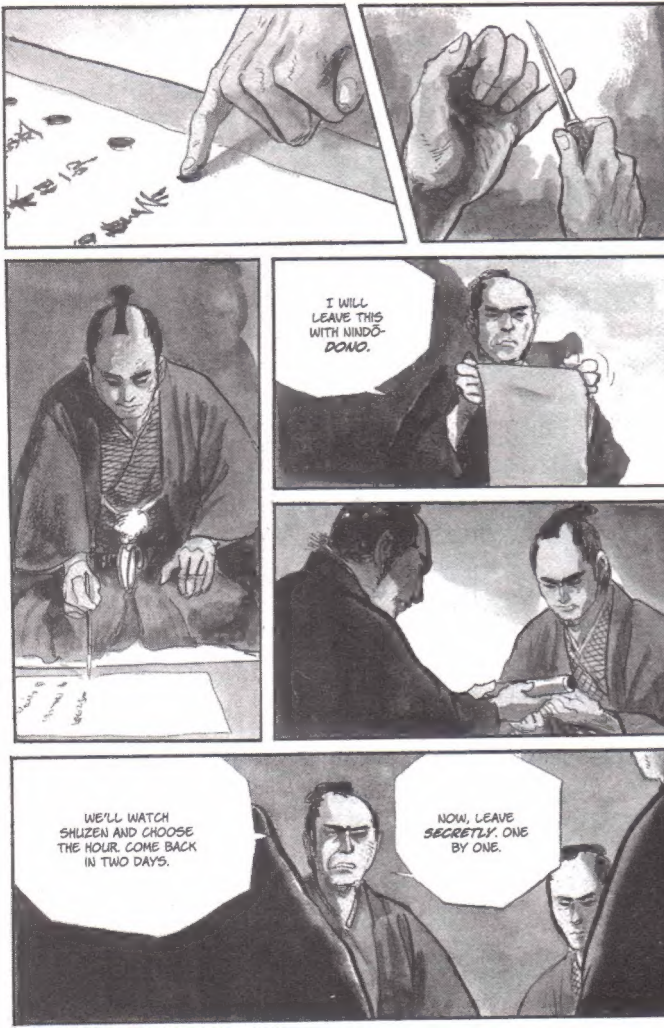


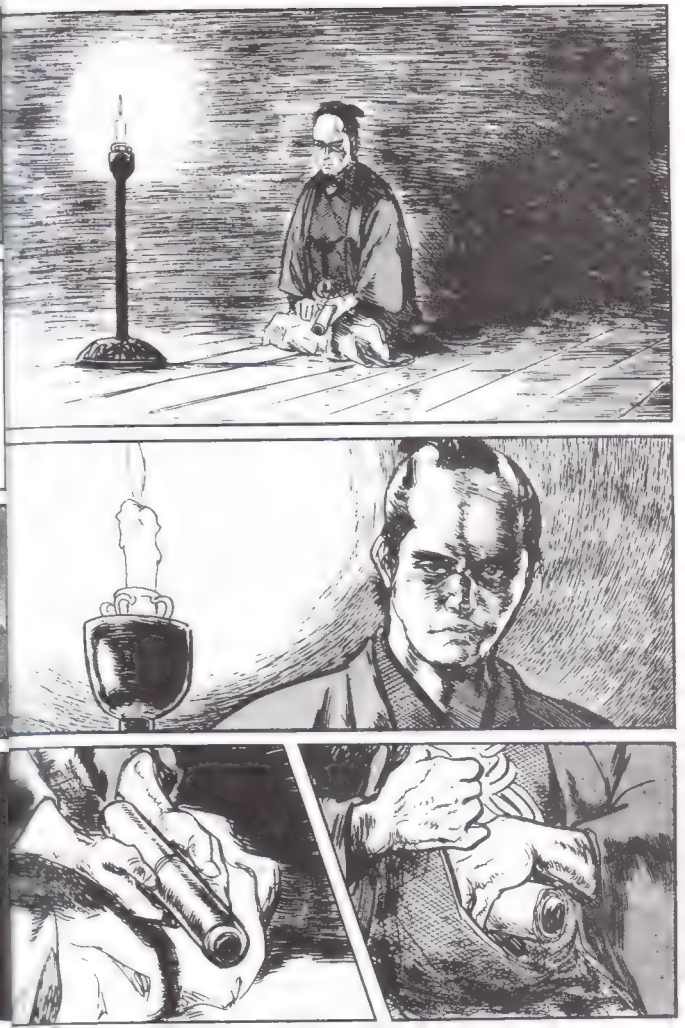

HE SHOULD DIE!
KILL THE SCOUNDREL!

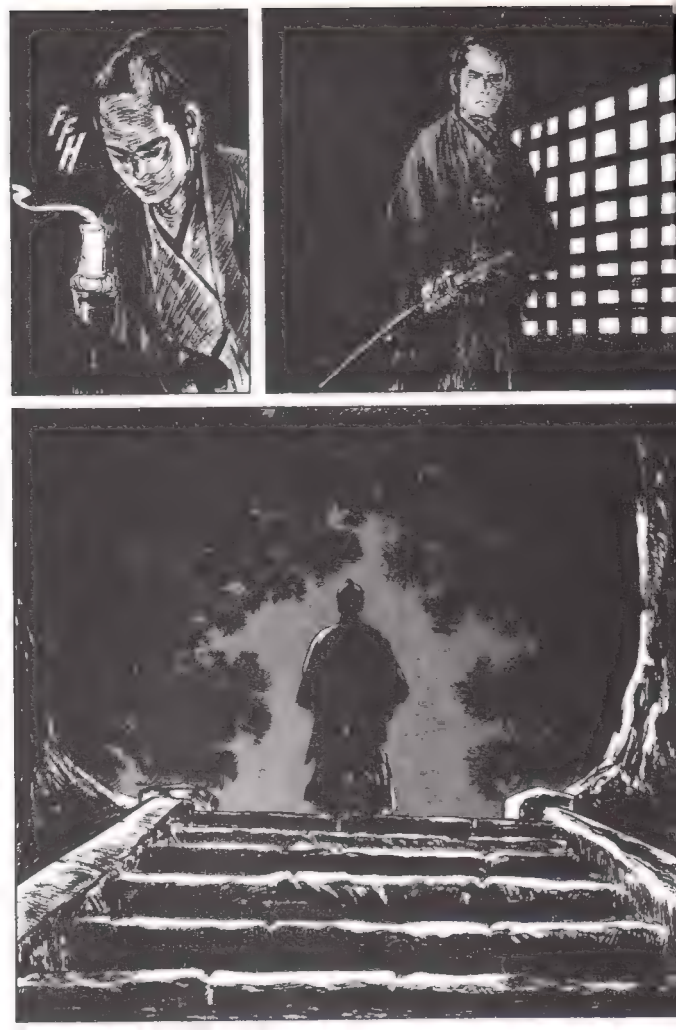

KARŌ YOSHIDA SHUZEN'S GONE TOO FAR!
WE'RE IN DEBT TO FUDASASHI FOR HIS MINING AND FLOOD CONTROL FIASCOS.
THE HAN COULD GO UNDER!
HE'S PUT HIS PUPPETS IN EVERY KEY POST.

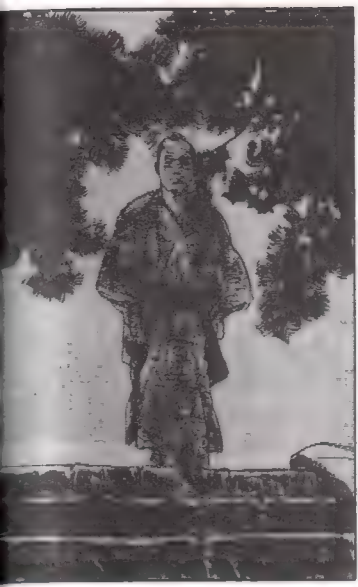
HE USES OUR YOUNG LORD! SHAMELESS!
HE BLAMES TAKEMURA-SAMA THE CONSTRUCTION BUGYO... WHILE HE'S WALLOWING IN SAKE AND WOMEN!
KILL HIM!
REFORM THE HAN! KILL YOSHIDA!
VERY WELL.


DOES ANYONE OBJECT?
THEN SIGN, IN BLOOD.


I WILL LEAVE THIS WITH NINDŌ-DONO.
WE'LL WATCH SHUZEN AND CHOOSE THE HOUR. COME BACK IN TWO DAYS.
NOW, LEAVE SECRETLY. ONE BY ONE.







吉田
*YOSHIDA

THD
THD
NINDŌ
UKON,
CAVALRY
OFFICER.
I MUST
SPEAK TO THE
GO-KARŌ-
SAMA!
THOK
THOK
I KNOW IT IS
LATE, BUT MY
MATTER IS
URGENT...
KREEEK

GO-SHINAN-SAMA.
NINDŌ, EH? WHAT'S UP?
IT'S FOR THE GO-KARŌ'S EARS ONLY, SIR.
HRMM... THEN, YOUR SWORDS.
AND I HAVE TO SEARCH FOR HIDDEN WEAPONS.

I KNOW YOU WOULDN'T HURT A FLY.
BUT WITH THOSE SO-CALLED REFORMERS AROUND...
...IT'S MY DUTY AS SHINAN TO PROTECT HIM.
YOU'RE CLEAN. COME ON.

秋
WHAT IS IT?
THIS, SIR.

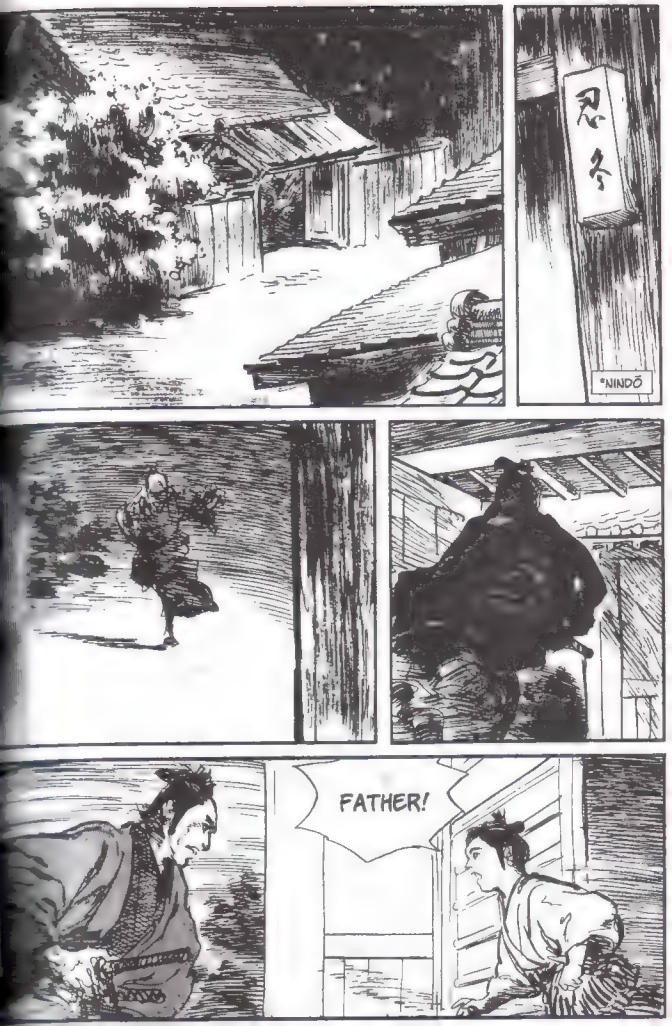
ISN'T THIS...?!
YES, SIR. A BLOOD PLEDGE. MEN SWORN TO MURDER YOU.
WHAT ...?!
MY NAME IS THERE, TOO... BUT FORGIVE ME. I HAD TO SIGN.
AND I'D HEARD ABOUT THESE "REFORMERS." BUT I NEVER DREAMED THEY'D GO SO FAR..

THEY GAVE THIS TO YOU?
YES, SIR.
NIANDŌ, WAS IT?
YES. HE'S AN ASHIGARA, SIR, BUT THE YOUNG MEN SEEM TO TRUST HIM.
THEY MUST. TO GIVE HIM THIS.
SO WHY WOULD SUCH A TRUSTED MAN SELL OUT HIS FRIENDS?
BETRAYAL. A BUSHI'S GREATEST SHAME...
SIR! DISLOYALTY IS WORSE THAN BETRAYAL. BETRAYED FEALTY DESERVES A THOUSAND DEATHS.
I TRIED TO SHOW THEM IT WAS DISLOYAL TO ATTACK OUR LORD'S GO-KARŌ...

BUT I FAILED.
SO I CAME HERE... TO PUT OUT THE WILDFIRE BEFORE IT SPREADS.
EVEN IF PEOPLE CALL ME A TRAITOR, SHAMED FOREVER.
WELL SAID! WHAT SPIRIT! AND NOT IN VAIN.
HIYAMIZU!
SIR?
THE MEN WHO SIGNED THIS... THING.
SEIZE THEM!
SIR!
NINDŌ... I NEED MEN LIKE YOU! WE WILL SPEAK LATER.
MY LORD!

WOLF FIRE?!

NO!!
NOT NOW!
THUD
THUD
THUD


忍者
*NINDŌ
FATHER!

I SAW WOLF FIRE!
I KNOW. DON'T PANIC.
GET YOUR TRAVEL GEAR, SHINTARŌ. GO TO MOUNT KOKUZŌ.
LAUNCH THE SIGNAL JUST AS I TAUGHT YOU.
AND THEN WAIT.
YES, FATHER.
IF I'M NOT THERE IN FOUR HOURS, GO TO EDO.
YES, SIR
AND TAKE YOUR MOTHER'S IHAI!
YES, FATHER!

THD
THD

NINDŌ UKON! FOR THE GO-KARŌ!
BAM
BAM
WHERE IS HIYAMIZU-SAMA?
HE TOOK ALL HIS MEN AND WENT AFTER THE REBELS!

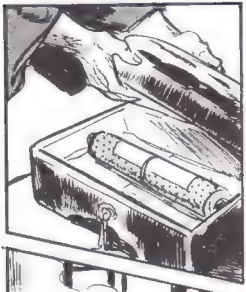
WHAT NOW, NINDŌ?
SIR, I...
FWHIT

CHOKK
GYAHH!

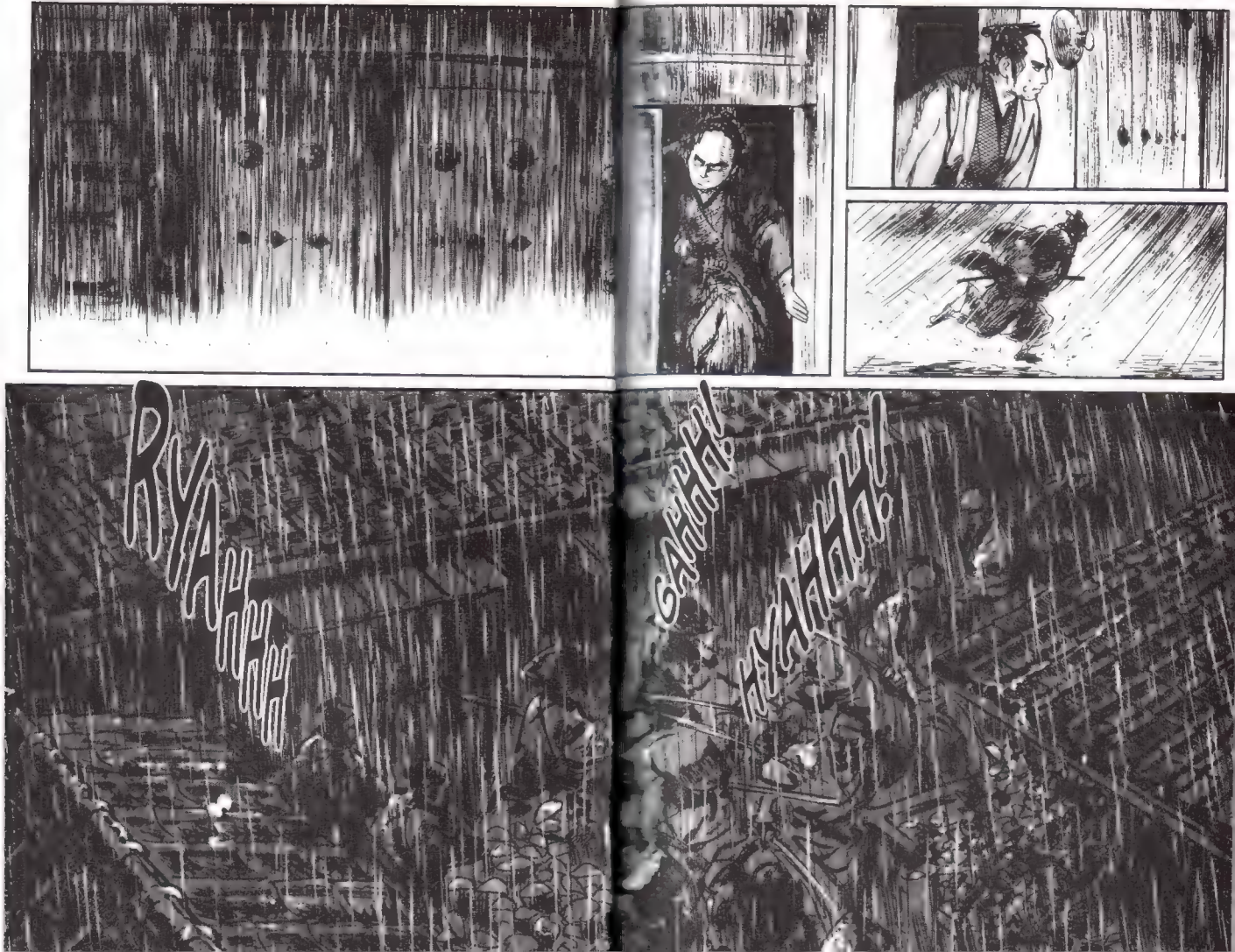
B-BASTARD... TRICKED ME...!
ACT LIKE... TRAITOR...
MADE ME... SEND AWAY... HIYAMIZU...
THUK
WRONG, MY LORD. I HAD TO.

AH?!
DAMN YOU!!
SKLSSH
AUGGH
FWO

KSSHH
RAIN...PY
SSSSH



"I PUNISHED YOSHIDA SHUZEN. I'VE FLED THE HAN. NINDŌ UKON
吉田主膳を誅殺し
脱藩するもの也
忍戸右近
I DIDN'T HATE YOU, SIR.
I HAD TO DO IT. EVERYTHING.
MY APOLOGIES.


RYAHH
GAHH!
HAAHH!

HYAHHH!
YAHH!
HAAH!!
HYAHH!
RYAHHH!

PATHETIC FOOLS! REFORM, IS IT?! KILL THE GO-KARÔP!
YOU'RE WORST OF ALL...BETRAYING OUR LORD AS YOSHIDA'S LAP DOG!
YOU STILL RESIST? THEN... NO MERCY!

BUT... YOU DON'T HAVE ANY PROOF.
HEH, HEH... SORRY. THE GO-KARŌ HAS YOUR BLOOD PLEDGE!
WHAT ...?!
SURPRISED...? NINDŌ BROUGHT IT TO HIM.
H-NINDŌ-SAMA ...?!
YOU LIE!!
HEH... HOW ELSE COULD I FIND YOU?
AHH...?!
NINDŌ...YOU TRAITOR!!

RYAHHH!
FWAKK
KLANG

吉田主膳 を 誅殺し
脱藩 するその七
忍々石近

DAMN YOU...
YOU PLANNED IT.
PLAYING THE TRAITOR. LURING ME AWAY WITH THAT LIST. AND WHILE I WAS GONE...
NINDŌ UKON! YOU'LL PAY!
WAIT...?
A SINGLE STROKE... PERFECT TECHNIQUE... ....?
....
....
MY HORSE!

DRN
DRN
DRN

KTHOK
KTHOK
DRN DRN DRN

FATHER!
IS
ORDER
OVER?
YES,
SIR. IT WAS
RAINING.
THEN
WE WAIT.
WHEN
IT RAINS...
TWO HOUR
INCREMENTS.

GO ON AHEAD, SON.
BUT, FATHER
EVEN IF I DON'T MAKE IT...
...I'VE TAUGHT YOU ALL OUR SECRETS. YOU'RE GREEN, BUT YOU'RE GRASS. DO YOUR DUTY!
NOW GO!
Y-YES SIR!

STOP THE RAIN!

NINDŌ UKON! YOU'RE YAGYŪ KUSA!
I'D HEARD RUMORS...
NINJA! WAITING, HIDDEN FOR GENERATIONS.
AND IT EXPLAINS EVERYTHING YOU'VE DONE!

I'M KUMATA'S SHINAN. I TRAINED YOU.
I KNOW YOUR SWORDWORK--CLUMSY! AMATEURISH! YET YOU KILLED THE GO-KARŌ WITH A SINGLE, FLAWLESS STROKE!
WHY CONCEAL SKILL LIKE THAT? IT WOULDN'T MAKE SENSE. AND NOT EASY, HIDING IT FROM YOUR TEACHER.
I LIVE BY THE SWORD...
...AND YET, TO MY SHAME, I COULDN'T TELL!

YOU GOT COZY WITH THE REFORMERS TO SET YOUR HANDS ON THEIR *BLOOD PLEDGE*. YOU *WANTED* TO BETRAY THEM. BUT *WHY?*
FOR A *PROMOTION!* A MERE *ASHIGARA* COULDN'T STEAL ANY SECRETS FOR YOUR YABYŪ MASTERS.
IN FACT... MAYBE YOU *STARTED* THE REFORM MOVEMENT *YOURSELF!* BUT NOW YOU'VE GOT TO LEAVE, FOR SOME REASON...
...SO YOU PULL A FAST one. YOU KILL THE *GO-KARŌ* LIKE YOU'D MEANT TO ALL *ALONG!* THAT WAY...
...IT'S *NATURAL* TO RUN!
I THOUGHT IT THROUGH ON THE WAY. *EVERYTHING* FITS!
I FIGURED A *NINJA* WOULD ESCAPE OVER KOKUZŌ.

THE
HMM?
NO ONE
KNOWS.
I'M
NOT THAT
EASY!
RYAHHH!
KANG

SKSSH
HRRK
THE RAIN HAS STOPPED

WHIFF
SHUKK

WHSHOOM

the hundred and twenty-ninth

Struggle in the Dark

SPLSSH

SHISH
SPSSH

BLOOSH

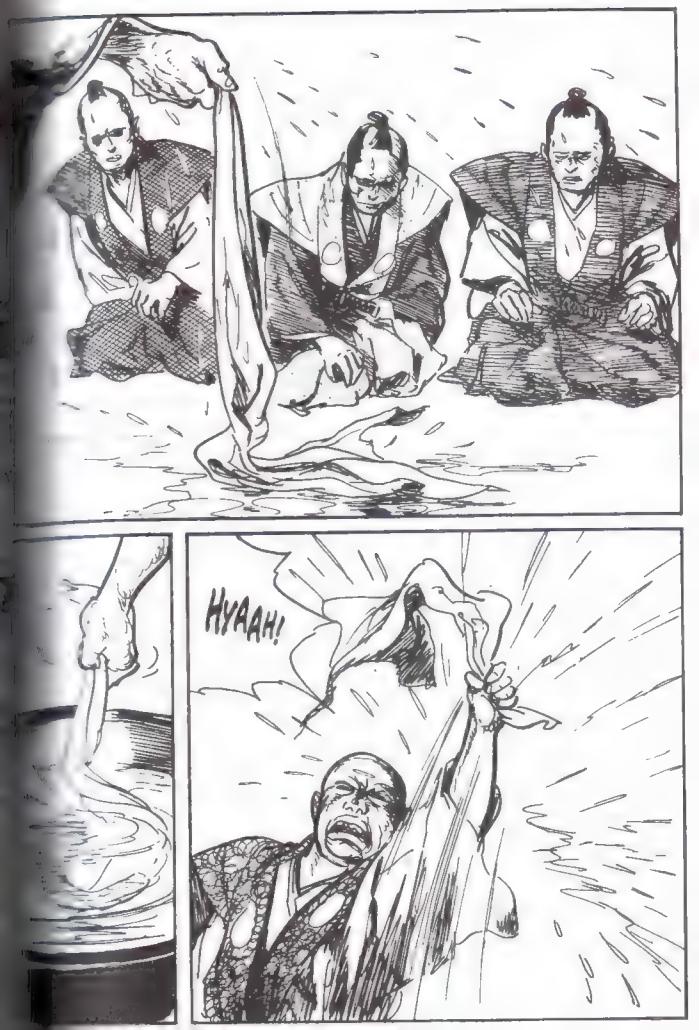
SKSSH
SKSSH
SKSSH
SKSSH

SKSSH
SKSSH
SKSSH
SKSSH

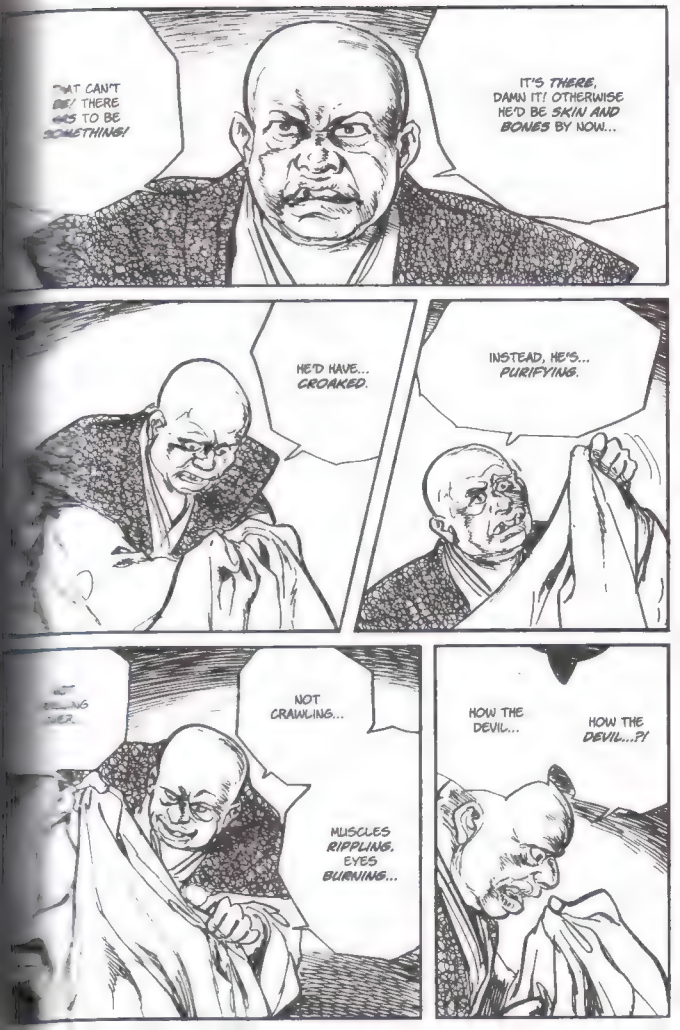
AH!

HAAH...
HFF...
HAAH...
SIR?!
MASTER...? WHAT'S WRONG?!
FETCH ME A BUCKET OF WATER! AND A TOWEL!
SIR...?!

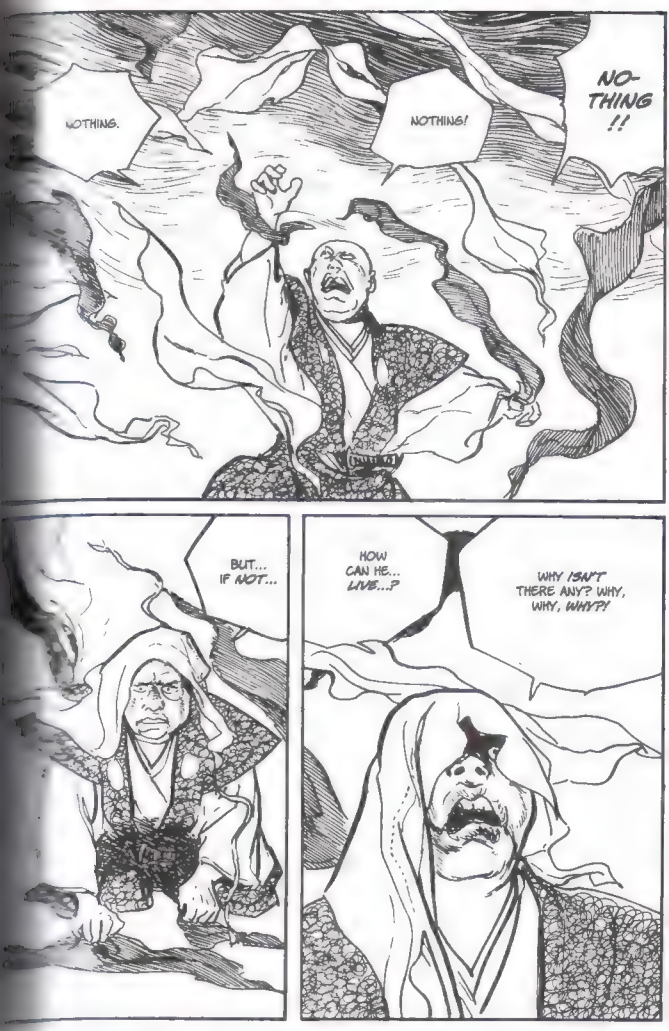
YAAAH!
FLPP


HYAAH!

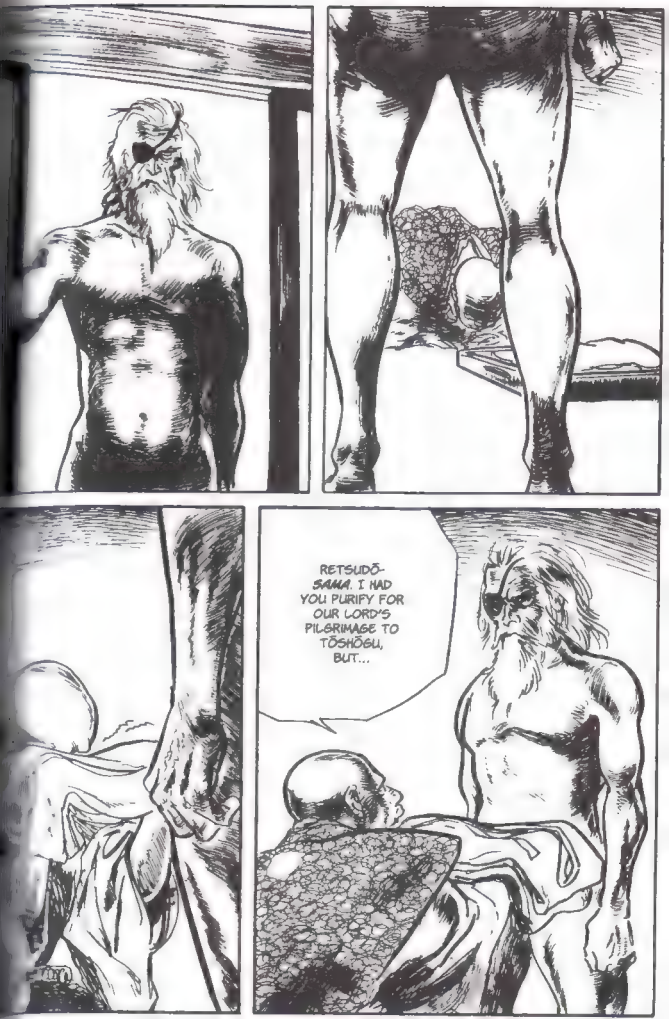
GO-SHIHAI-SAMA?
ARE YOU FEELING WELL?
DID YOU SEARCH HIS CLOTHES?
YES, SIR. WE DID, BUT...
NO SUIKATSUGAN. NO KIKATSUGAN. NO NINJA FOOD AT ALL.


THAT CAN'T BE! THERE HAS TO BE SOMETHING!
IT'S THERE, DAMN IT! OTHERWISE HE'D BE SKIN AND BONES BY NOW...
HE'D HAVE... CROAKED.
INSTEAD, HE'S... PURIFYING.
NOT CRAWLING...
MUSCLES RIPPLING, EYES BURNING...
HOW THE DEVIL...
HOW THE DEVIL...?!

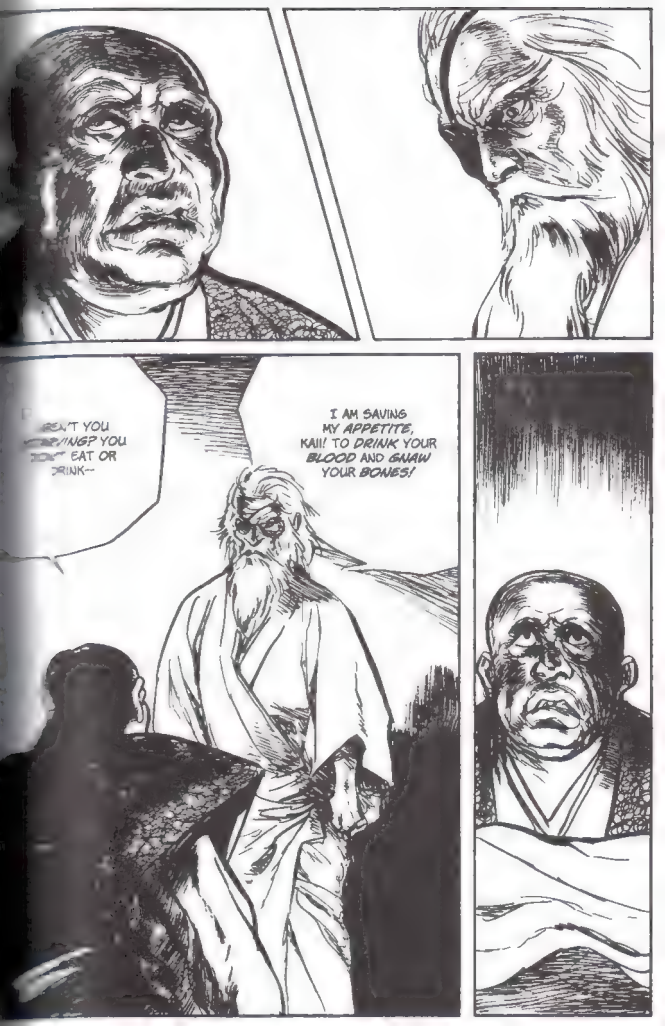
CHKK CHKK
IT CAN'T BE!
IT'S HERE!
CHKK CHKK
HERE SOMEWHERE..!
CAN'T BE. HAS TO BE!
NOTHING.
NOTHING...
ANYWHERE!
NO NINJA GOODIES... NOTHING!

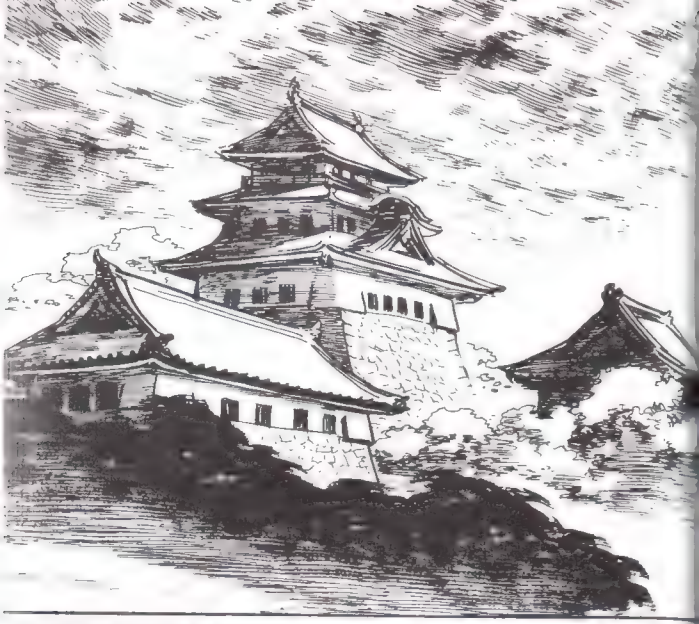

NOTHING.
NOTHING!
NO-THING!!
BUT... IF NOT...
HOW CAN HE... LIVE...?
WHY ISN'T THERE ANY? WHY, WHY, WHY?!

WE'RE BACK TO SQUARE ONE. ALL OVER AGAIN!
NO DRINK, NO FOOD, NO SLEEP, NO PEE. SO WHY'S HE SO DAMNED HEALTHY?!
RETSUDŌ-SAMA HAS FINISHED HIS BATH!
SHRAK


RETSUDŌ-SAMA. I HAD YOU PURIFY FOR OUR LORD'S PILGRIMAGE TO TŌSHŌGŪ, BUT...

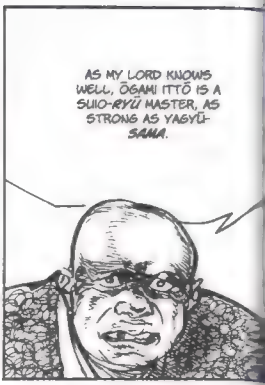
...I ALSO PREPARED NEW CLOTHES.
THEY HAVE NO CREST, BUT...
...PLEASE WEAR THEM.
I...I HAVE ONE QUESTION, SIR.

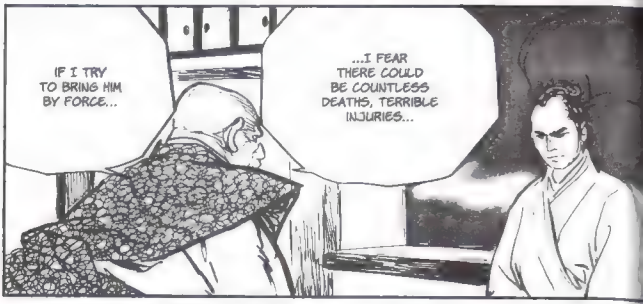

...AREN'T YOU ...ERING? YOU ...EAT OR ...RINK--
I AM SAVING MY APPETITE, KAII! TO DRINK YOUR BLOOD AND GNAW YOUR BONES!

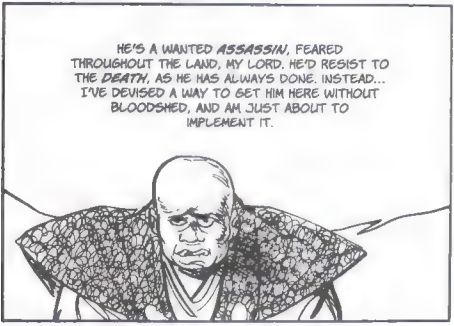


MY LORD!
YOU SAID YOU KNEW WHERE ŌGAMI-Ō IS, BUT YOU'VE DONE NOTHING! WHY NOT?!
THE MACHI BUGYŌ SAYS ITTŌ IS LIVING ON THE HATCHŌ STRAND!
HE'S EVEN BUILT A HUT, BY GOD!
MY LORD, I...
BRING HIM! NOW! IT WAS YOUR IDEA TO HAVE HIM FACE RETSUDŌ!

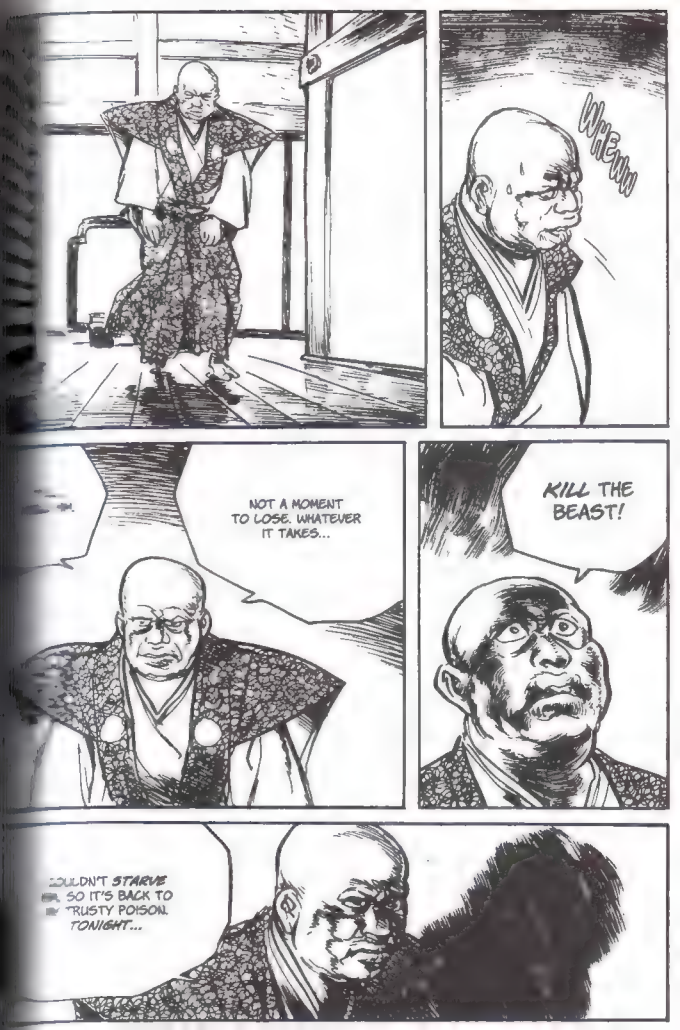
FORGIVE ME...


AS MY LORD KNOWS WELL, ŌGAMI ITTŌ IS A SHIO-RYŪ MASTER, AS STRONG AS YAGYŪ-SAMA.

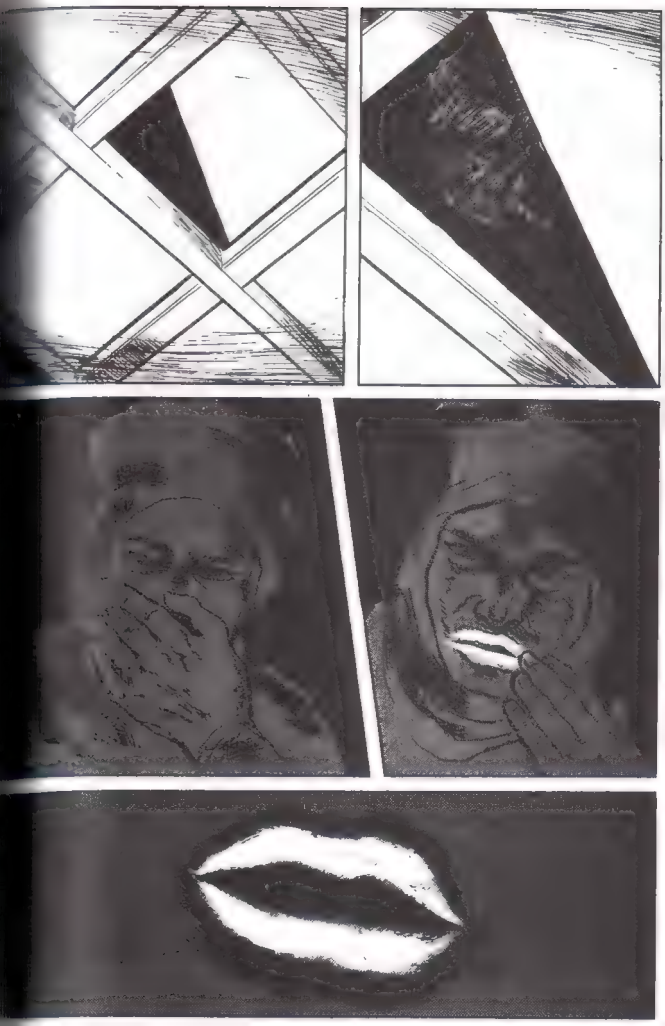

IF I TRY TO BRING HIM BY FORCE...
...I FEAR THERE COULD BE COUNTLESS DEATHS, TERRIBLE INJURIES...


HE'S A WANTED ASSASSIN, FEARED THROUGHOUT THE LAND, MY LORD. HE'D RESIST TO THE DEATH, AS HE HAS ALWAYS DONE. INSTEAD... I'VE DEVISED A WAY TO GET HIM HERE WITHOUT BLOODSHED, AND AM JUST ABOUT TO IMPLEMENT IT.

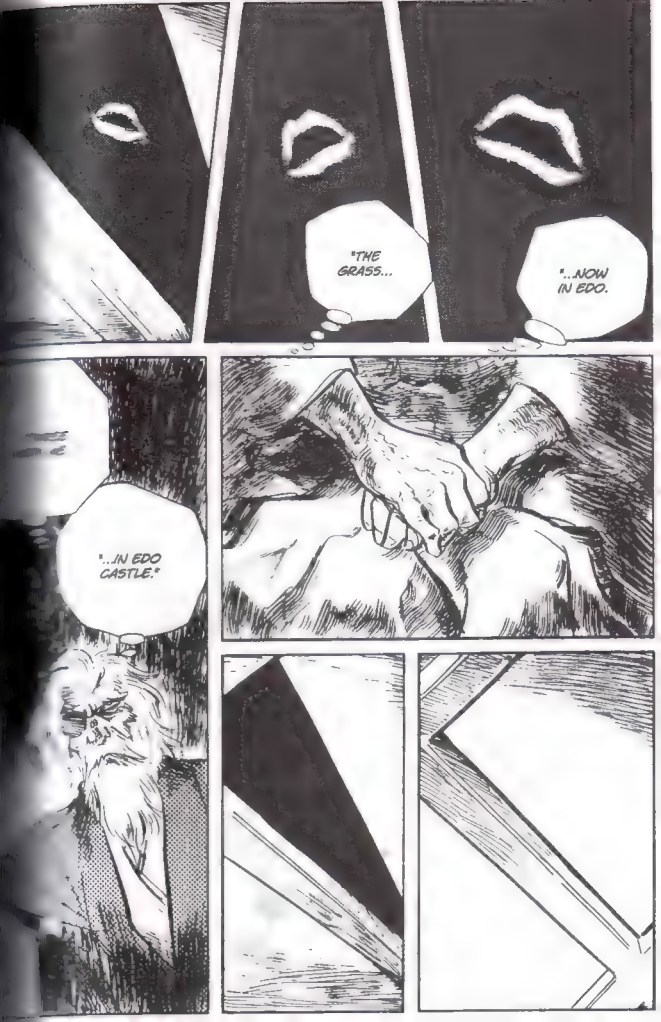
PLEASE, MY LORD. JUST A LITTLE LONGER...


WHEW!!!
NOT A MOMENT TO LOSE. WHATEVER IT TAKES...
KILL THE BEAST!
...OULDN'T STARVE SO IT'S BACK TO ...RUSTY POISON TONIGHT...

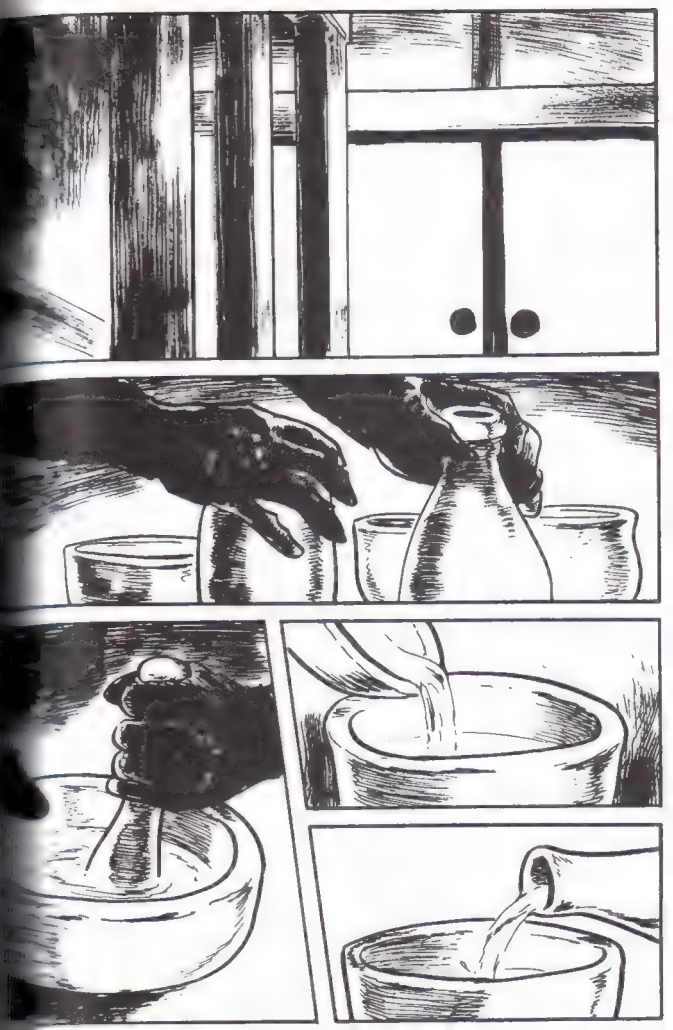
KILL HIM WHILE HE'S IN MY HANDS...
BRRR
HAVE TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE SUICIDE.
BUT... MUST KILL.



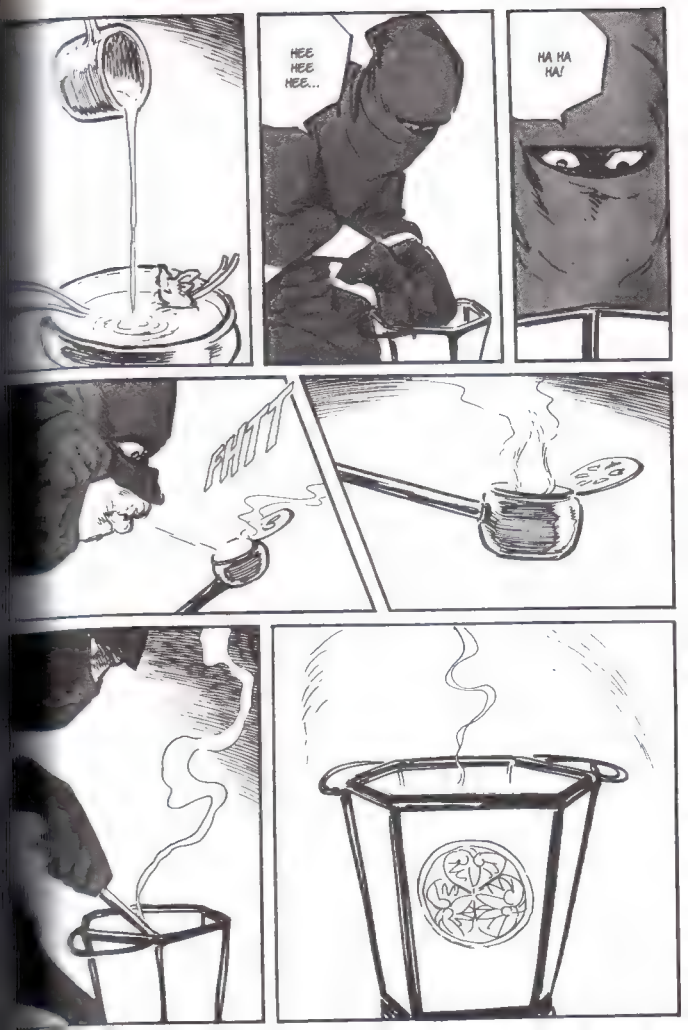
"ABE... QUESTIONED... IN SHŌGUN'S CHAMBER...
"OUTCOME...
"HE RESOLVES TO MURDER RETSUDŌ-SAMA...
"WITH POISON TONIGHT"

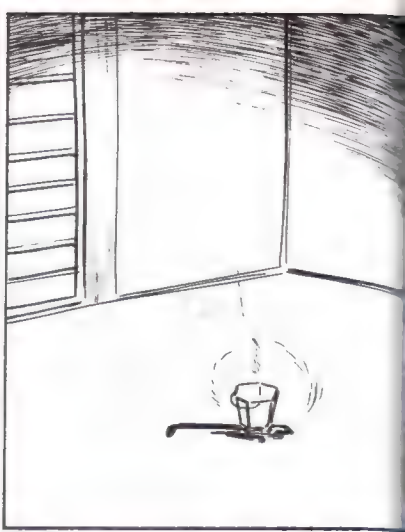

"THE GRASS...
"...NOW IN EDO.
"...IN EDO CASTLE."

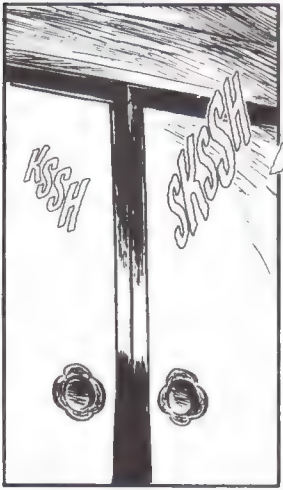
AT LAST, EH? YOUR MOST SUBTLE POISON.
INSO... FOO...



HEE HEE HEE HEE!
BWEE HEE HEE!


HEE HEE HEE...
HA HA HA!
FHIT!




KSSH
SKSSH

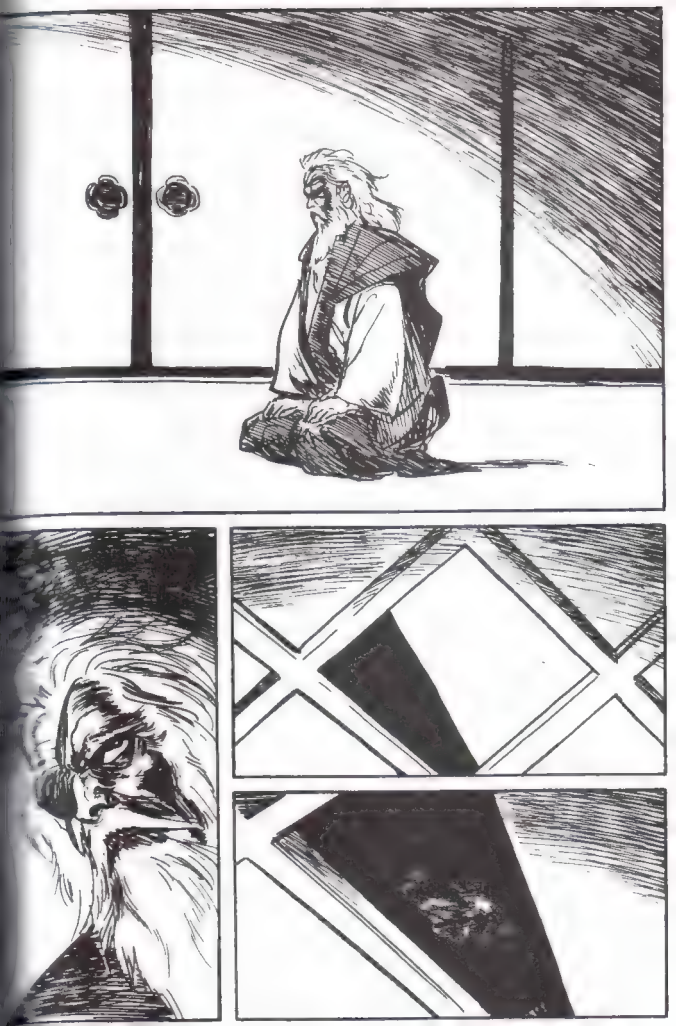
KSSH

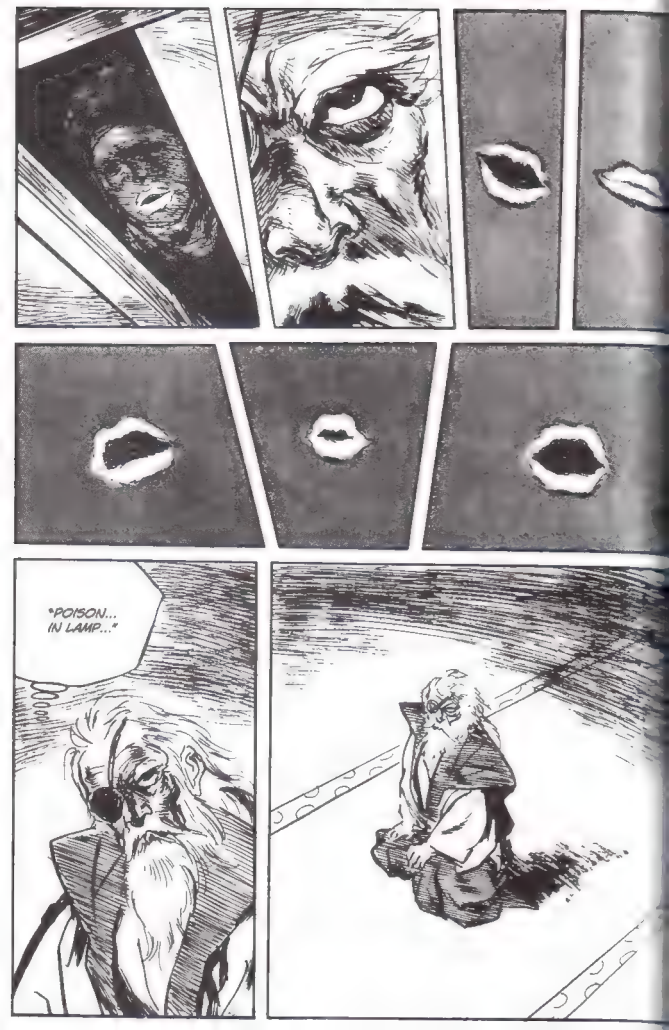
SKSH

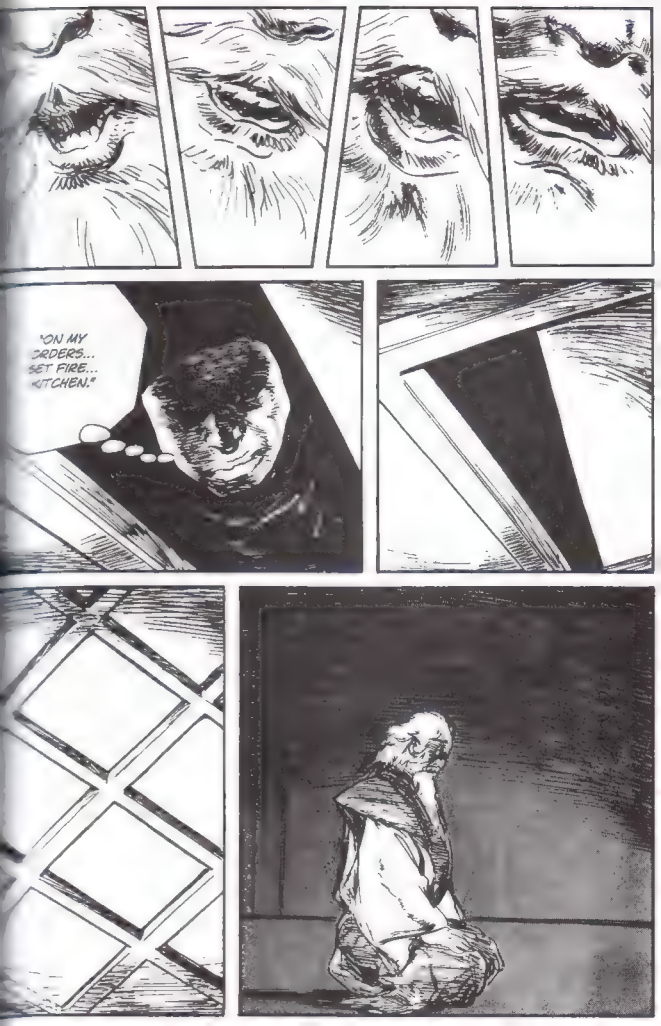
SKSSH
KEE

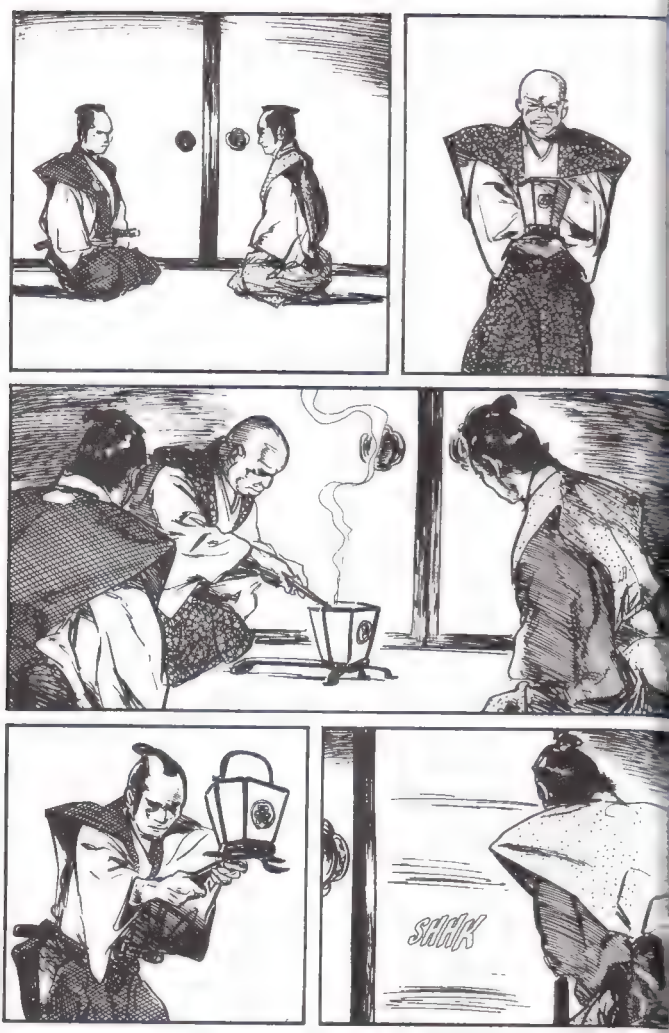
kaaa!

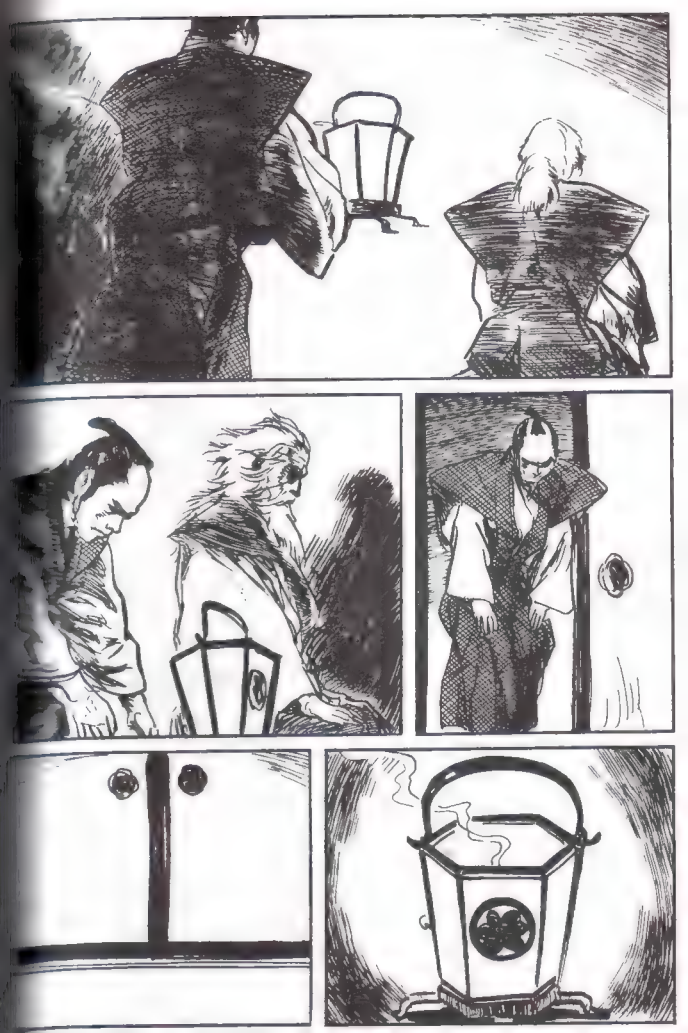
KILL HIM IN ONE *BREATH*, THEN MAKE IT LOOK LIKE HE CUT HIS OWN *STOMACH*.
THAT'S HOW YOU KILL A *MONSTER*

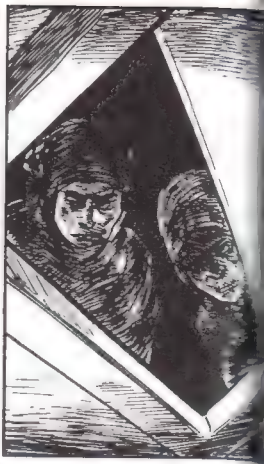
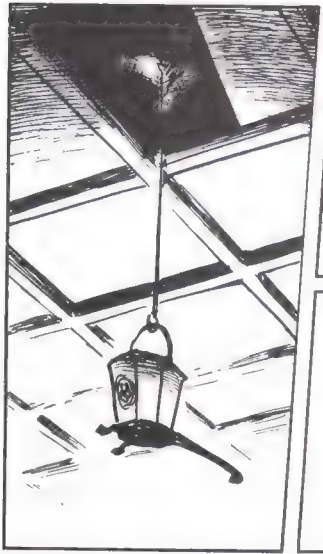
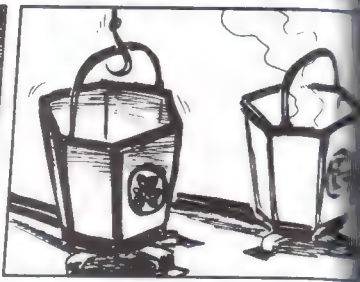



"POISON... IN LAMP..."


"ON MY ORDERS... SET FIRE... KITCHEN."


SHICK



KAII.
LEAVE IT OPEN.

DID YOU LEARN HOW TO PERFORM SEPPUKU?
...?!
NO...? I'M HAPPY TO SHOW MY KIND HOST.
TOSS
A FA
THE FAN'S
SEPPUKU
THE PAPE
OFFER
TRA

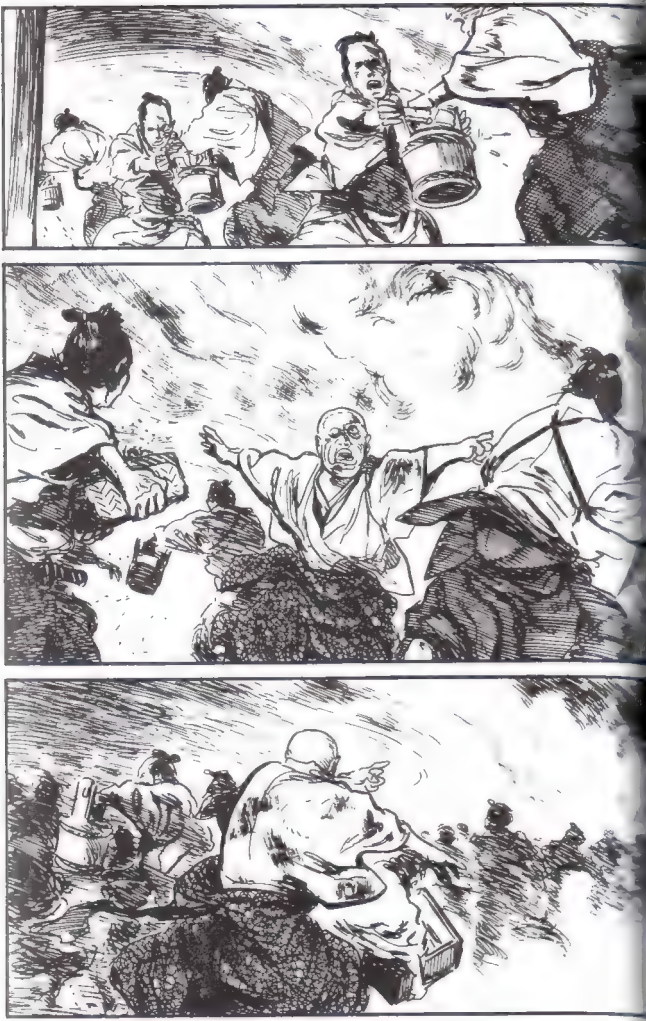
LEAN FORWARD, AND PLACE THE TRAY UNDER YOUR HIPS.
AFTER A SKILLFUL BEHEADING, YOUR HEAD WILL DANGLE BY A STRIP OF SKIN.

DON'T FORGET THIS!
BE A BUSH! IN DEATH! AT LAST!

SHRIEK!
WHAT... THE...
WH-WHAT DID HE... WHY...?
AND MY POISON! NOTHING!
H..HOW...?!
FWAP
A SAMURAI FIGHTS FOR HIS LORD, GLORY IN DEATH. YOU'RE STRUGGLING IN THE DARK, ABE. PITIFUL.

FIRE! FIRE!
FIRE IN THE KITCHEN!!
NO!!
THD THD THD
NOOOO!!

PUT IT OUT!
QUICKLY!!
PUT IT OUUUUT!!

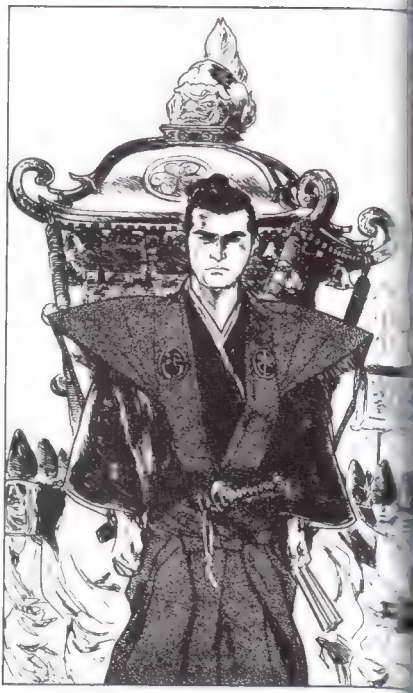


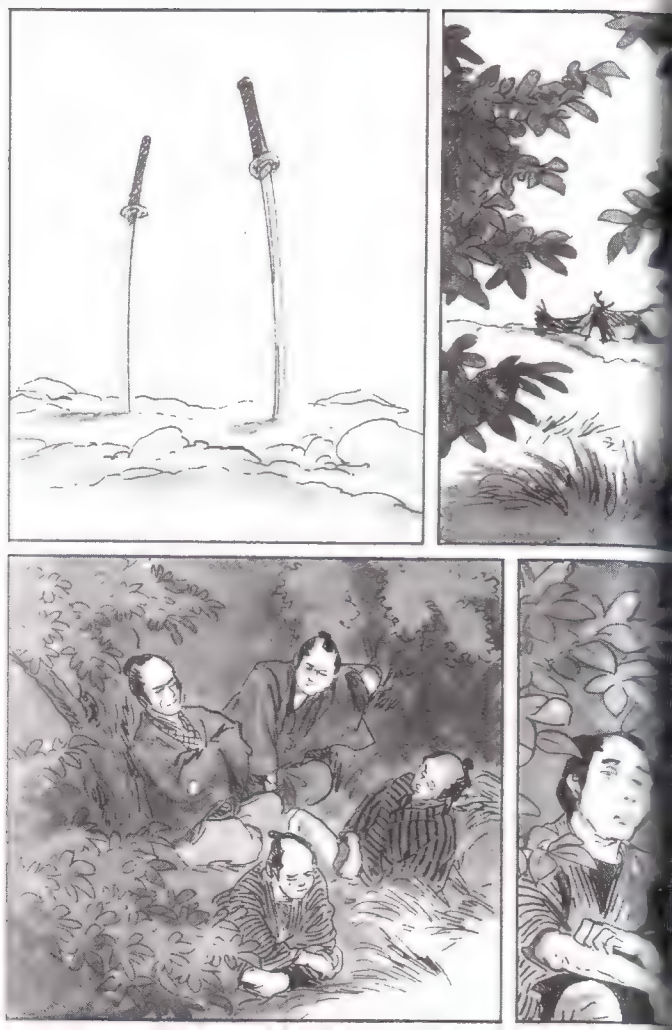
SPLSSSH
SHSSS

PHEWW... NOTHING SERIOUS.
AHH!!
OUR LORD VIS— TŌSHŌGŪ SHRINE
HE'S ALREADY BACK, BUT TODAY... ALL DAY...TO HAVE A FIRE MEANS...
...PUNISHMENT THE ABSOLUTE PUNISHMENT
S...SEPPUKU!! AUHH!

the hundred and thirtieth

Song of the Spirit

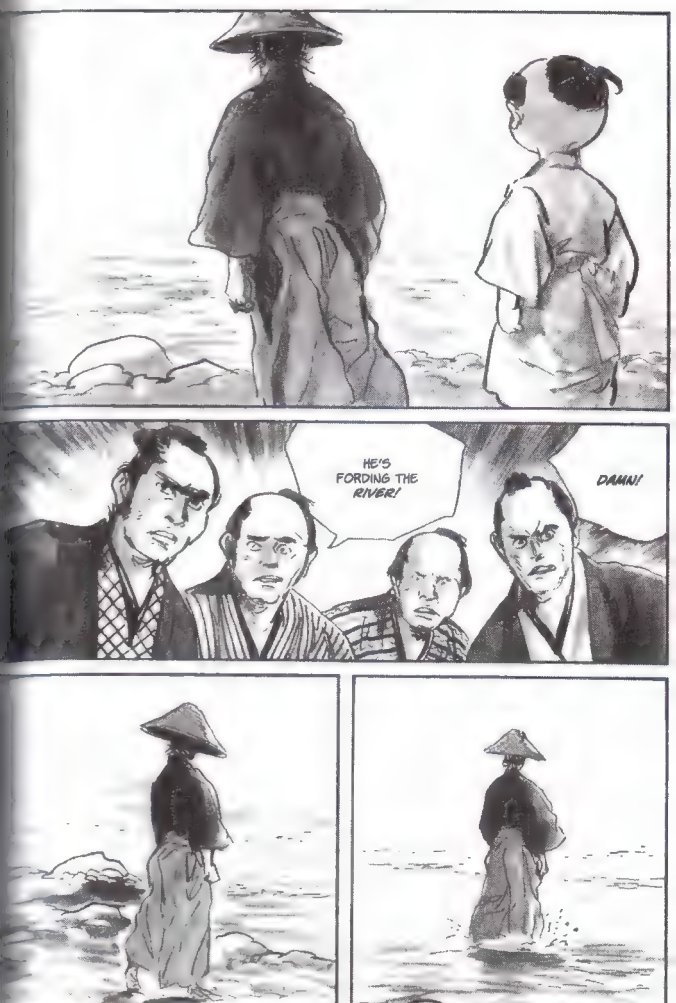


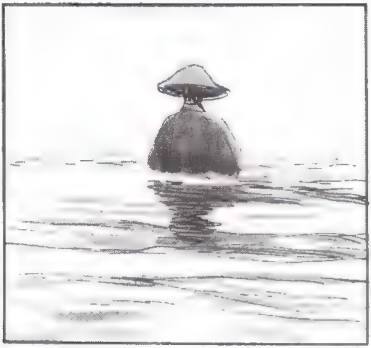


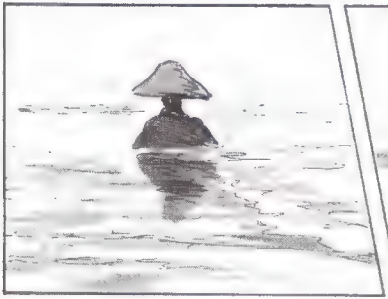
LOOKS LIKE HE'S HEADING OUT
YOU TWO TAIL HIM.
AND DON'T LOSE HIM!
RIGHT, BOSS.
HE'S OURS.

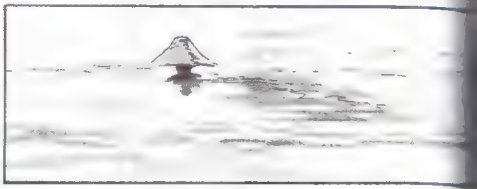
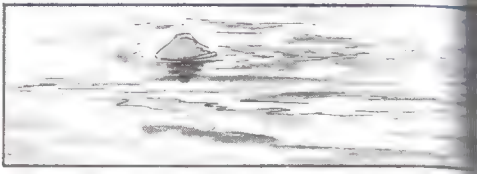
WHEN I SO TO FIGHT, YOU'LL BE WITH ME.
UNDERSTAND?

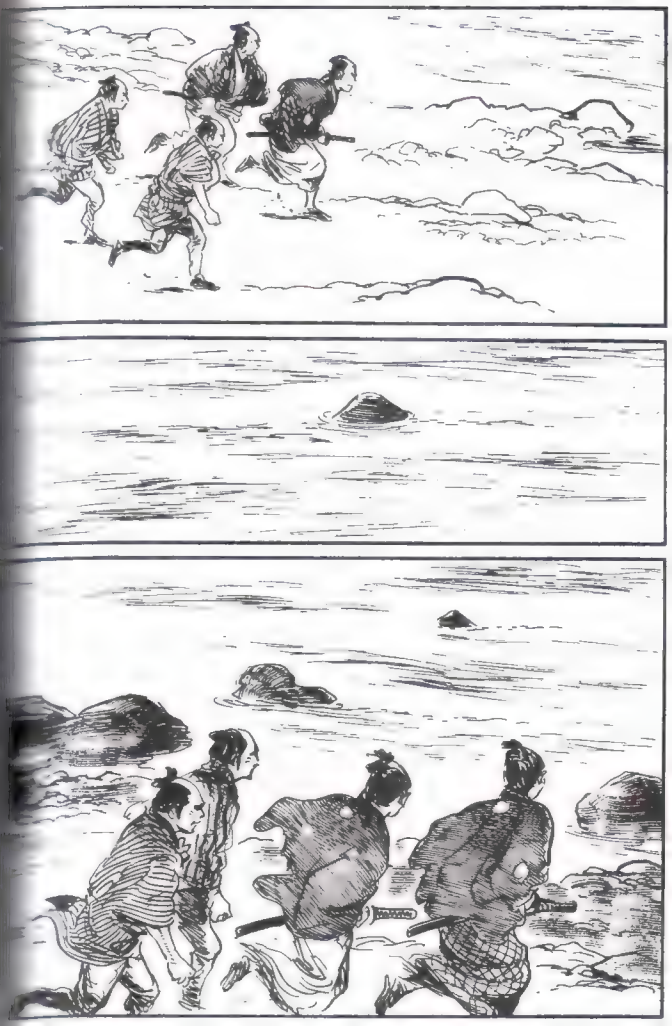
BUT FOR NOW, I LEAVE MY SPIRIT...
...IN YOUR HANDS, DAIGORO.
ARE YOU READY?

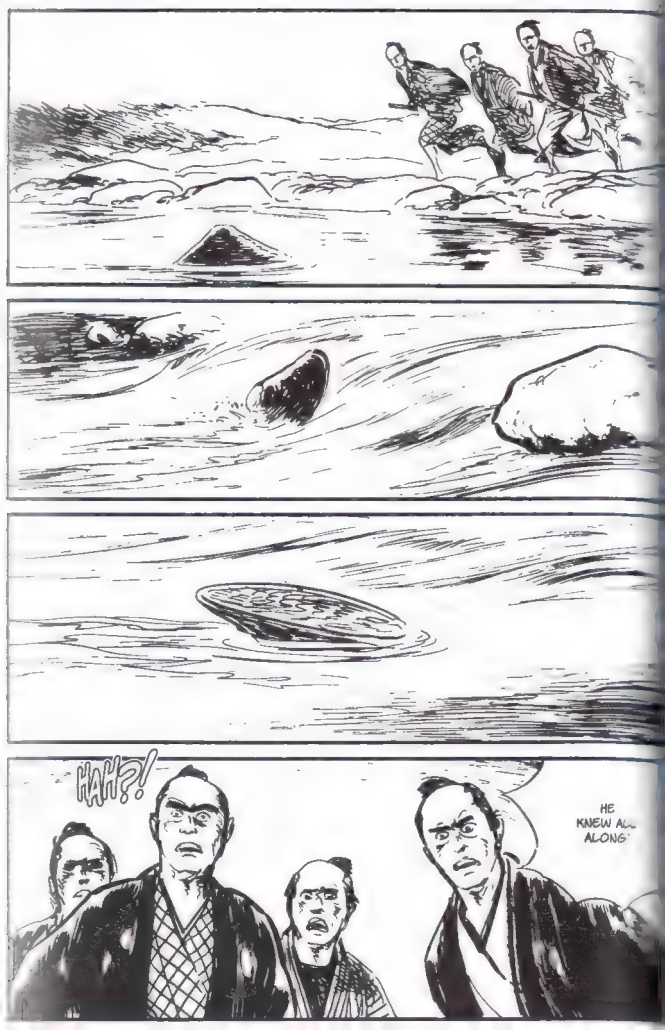

HE'S FORDING THE RIVER!
DAMN!

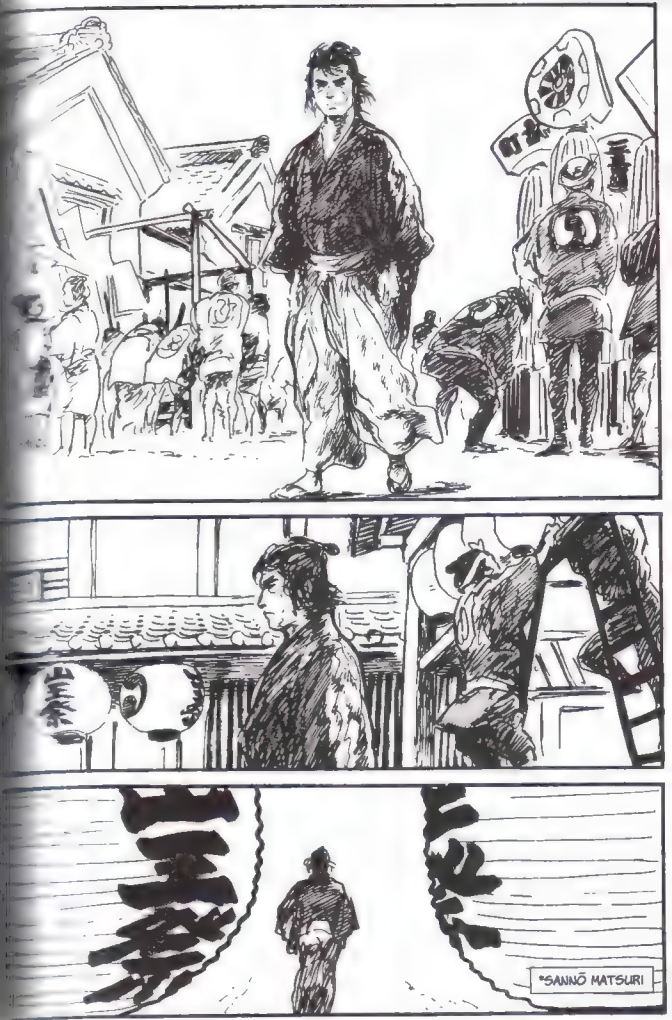


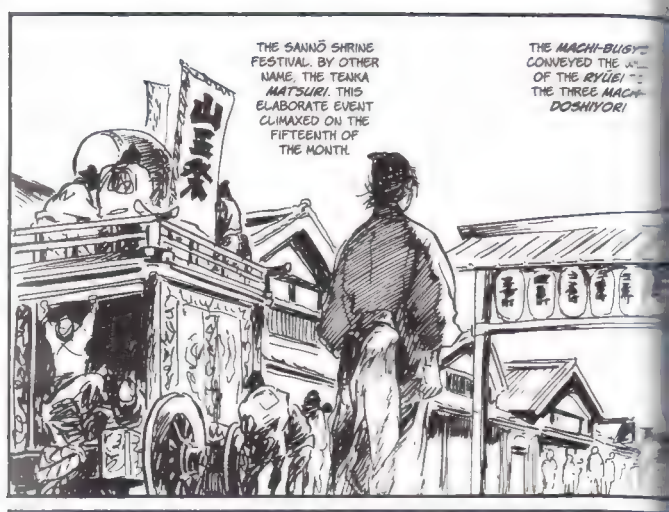


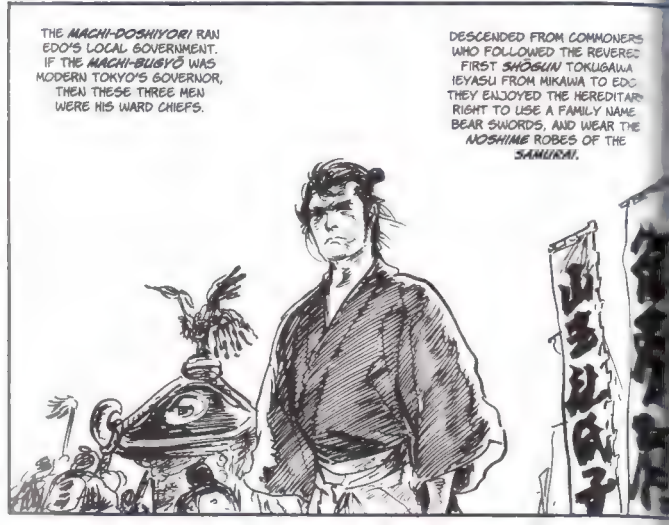



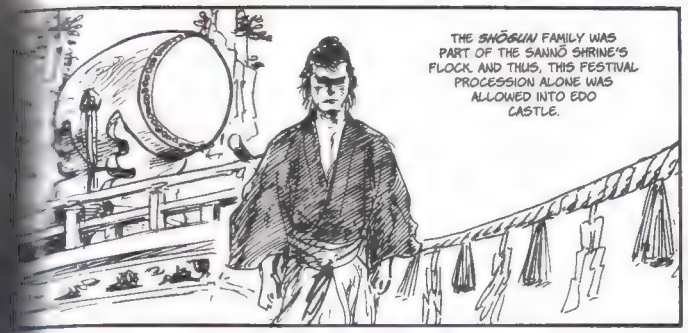



HAH?!
HE KNEW ALL ALONG


*SANNŌ MATSURI

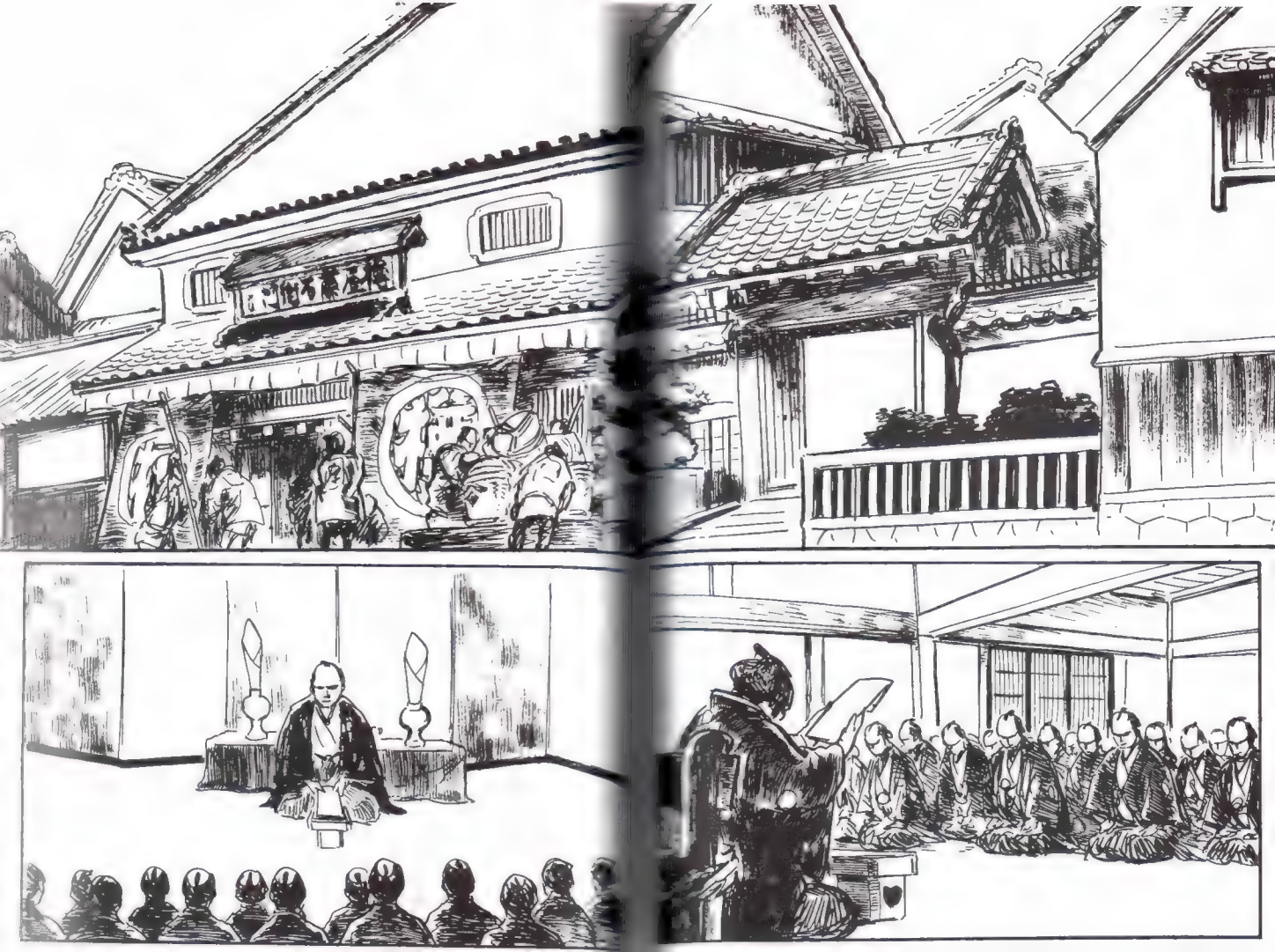

THE SANNŌ SHRINE FESTIVAL. BY OTHER NAME, THE TENKA MATSURI. THIS ELABORATE EVENT CLIMAXED ON THE FIFTEENTH OF THE MONTH.
THE MACHI-BUGYŌ CONVEYED THE [illegible] OF THE RYŪEI [illegible] THE THREE MACHI-DOSHIYORI

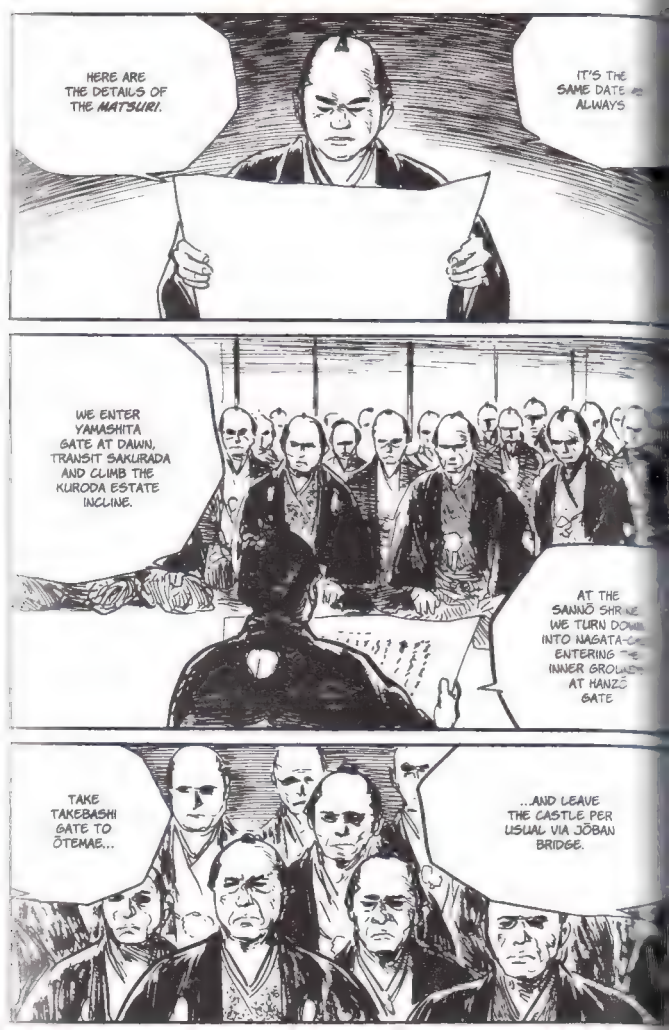

THE MACHI-DOSHIYORI RAN EDO'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT. IF THE MACHI-BUGYŌ WAS MODERN TOKYO'S GOVERNOR, THEN THESE THREE MEN WERE HIS WARD CHIEFS.
DESCENDED FROM COMMONERS WHO FOLLOWED THE REVERED FIRST SHŌGUN TOKUGAWA IEYASU FROM MIKAWA TO EDO, THEY ENJOYED THE HEREDITARY RIGHT TO USE A FAMILY NAME, BEAR SWORDS, AND WEAR THE NOSHIME ROBES OF THE SAMURAI.

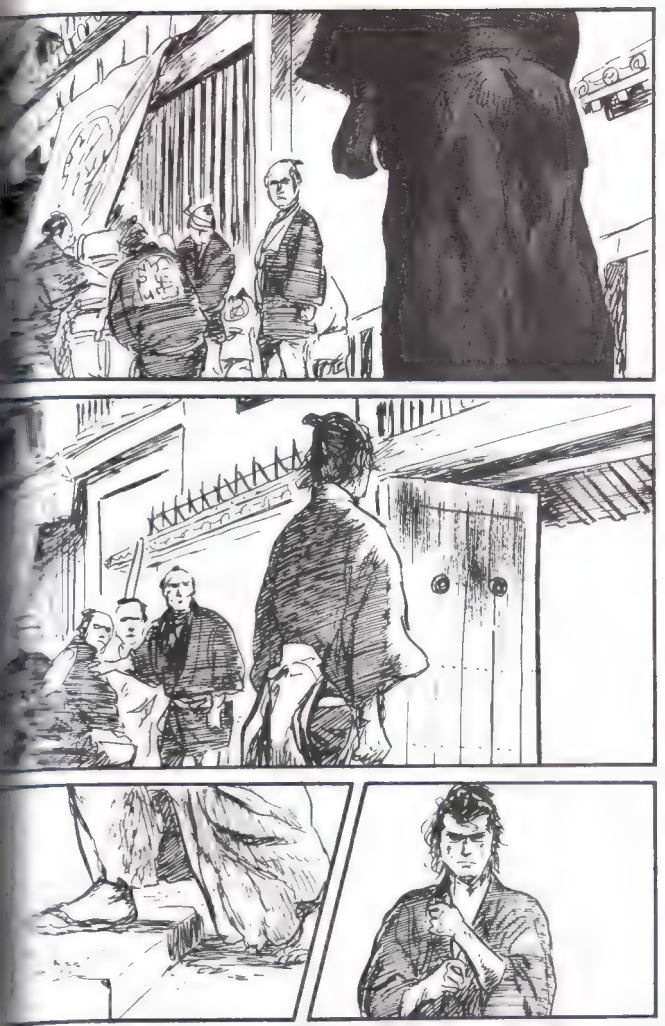

THE SHŌGUN FAMILY WAS PART OF THE SANNŌ SHRINE'S FLOCK. AND THUS, THIS FESTIVAL PROCESSION ALONE WAS ALLOWED INTO EDO CASTLE.

SEEKING TO ENTER THE CASTLE WITH IT...
...ŌGAMI ITTŌ STRODE TOWARD THE HOME OF TARUYA TŌEMON.

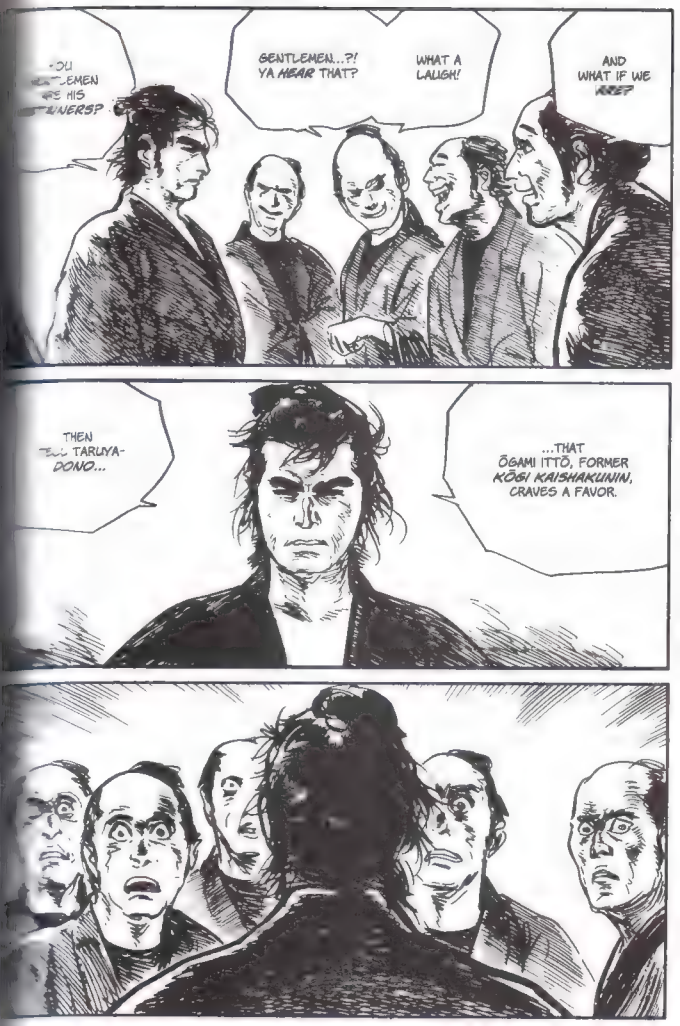
...THE MACHI-DOSHIYORI RUNNING EDO'S GREATEST FESTIVAL.

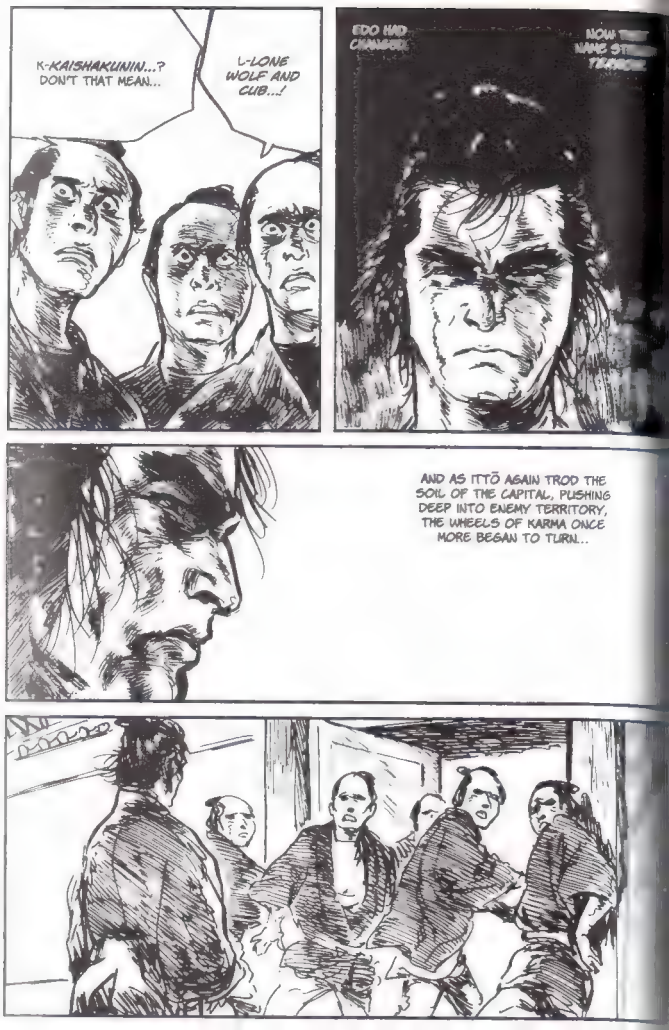


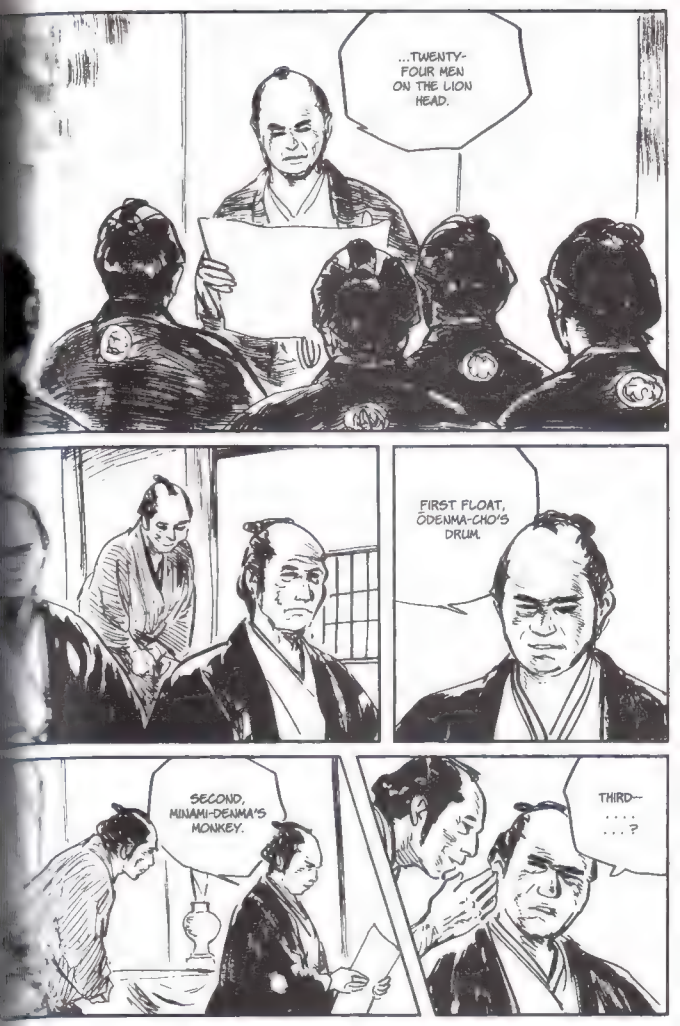

HERE ARE THE DETAILS OF THE MATSURI.
IT'S THE SAME DATE AS ALWAYS
WE ENTER YAMASHITA GATE AT DAWN, TRANSIT SAKURADA AND CLIMB THE KURODA ESTATE INCLINE.
AT THE SANNŌ SHRINE WE TURN DOWN INTO NAGATA-CHŌ, ENTERING THE INNER GROUNDS AT HANZŌ GATE
TAKE TAKEBASHI GATE TO ŌTEMAE...
...AND LEAVE THE CASTLE PER USUAL VIA JŌBAN BRIDGE.



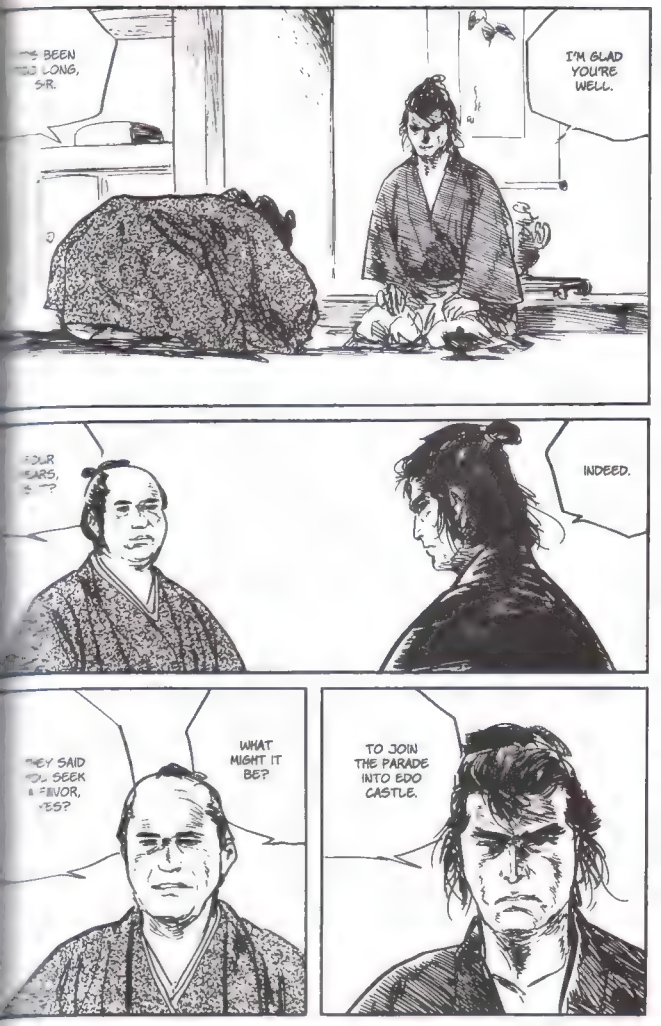
HOLD IT! WHERE YA GOIN', GO-RŌNIN?
I WISH TO SEE TARUYA TŌEMON-DONO.
THE BOSS DON'T GOT TIME FOR EVERY SCARECROW RŌNIN IN TOWN.
DON'T KNOW WHAT YER AFTER BUT SCRAM!
OH, I KNOW WHAT THESE BEGGARS WANT.
THE FESTIVAL'S COMIN', THEY WANNA SCORE A QUICK BUCK. HELL, WHO WOULDN'T?

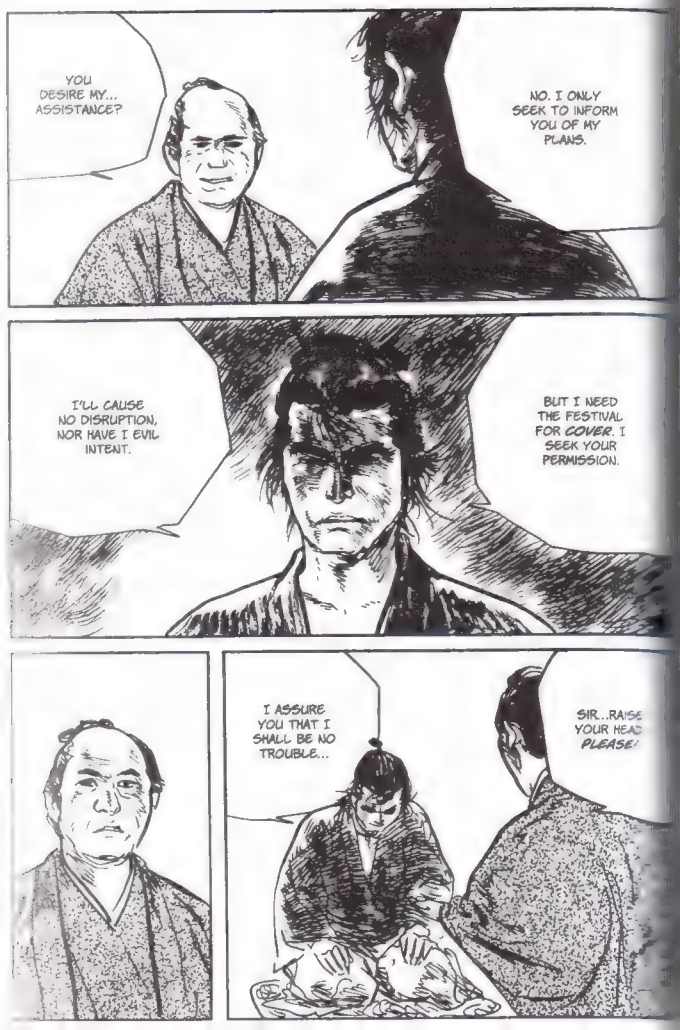

...OU
...LEMEN
...E HIS
...INERS?
GENTLEMEN...?! YA HEAR THAT?
WHAT A LAUGH!
AND WHAT IF WE DIE?
THEN ...TARUYA-DONO...
...THAT ŌGAMI ITTŌ, FORMER KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN, CRAVES A FAVOR.

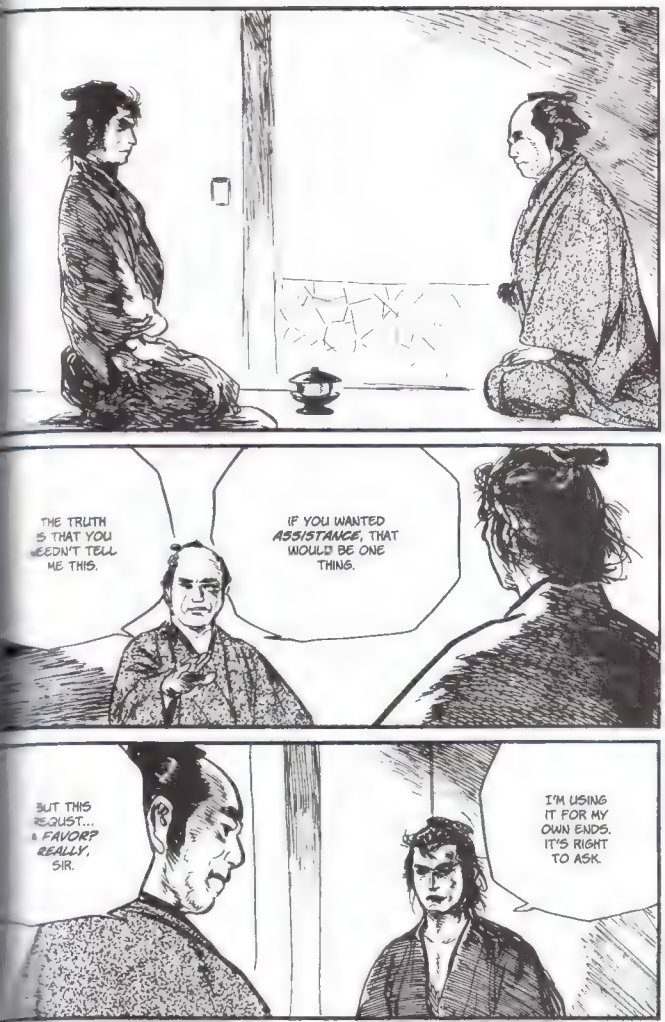

K-KAISHAKUNIN...? DON'T THAT MEAN...
L-LONE WOLF AND CUB...!
EDO HAD CHANGED.
AND AS ITTŌ AGAIN TROD THE SOIL OF THE CAPITAL, PUSHING DEEP INTO ENEMY TERRITORY, THE WHEELS OF KARMA ONCE MORE BEGAN TO TURN...


...TWENTY-FOUR MEN ON THE LION HEAD.
FIRST FLOAT, ODENMA-CHO'S DRUM.
SECOND, MINAMI-DENMA'S MONKEY.
THIRD--
. . . .
. . . ?

THE REAR HALL.
GENTLEMEN. URGENT BUSINESS.
PLEASE RELAX A WHILE.


'S BEEN
O LONG,
SIR.
I'M GLAD
YOU'RE
WELL.
OUR
EARS,
?
INDEED.
THEY SAID
OU SEEK
A FAVOR,
YES?
WHAT
MIGHT IT
BE?
TO JOIN
THE PARADE
INTO EDO
CASTLE.

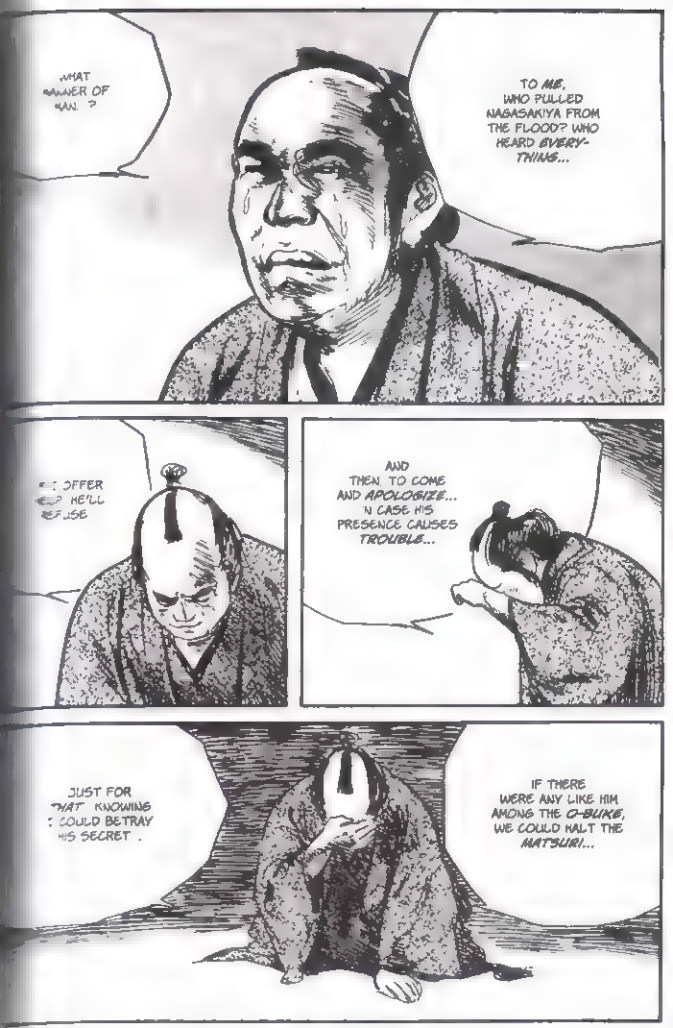

YOU DESIRE MY... ASSISTANCE?
NO. I ONLY SEEK TO INFORM YOU OF MY PLANS.
I'LL CAUSE NO DISRUPTION, NOR HAVE I EVIL INTENT.
BUT I NEED THE FESTIVAL FOR COVER. I SEEK YOUR PERMISSION.
I ASSURE YOU THAT I SHALL BE NO TROUBLE...
SIR..RAISE YOUR HEAD PLEASE!

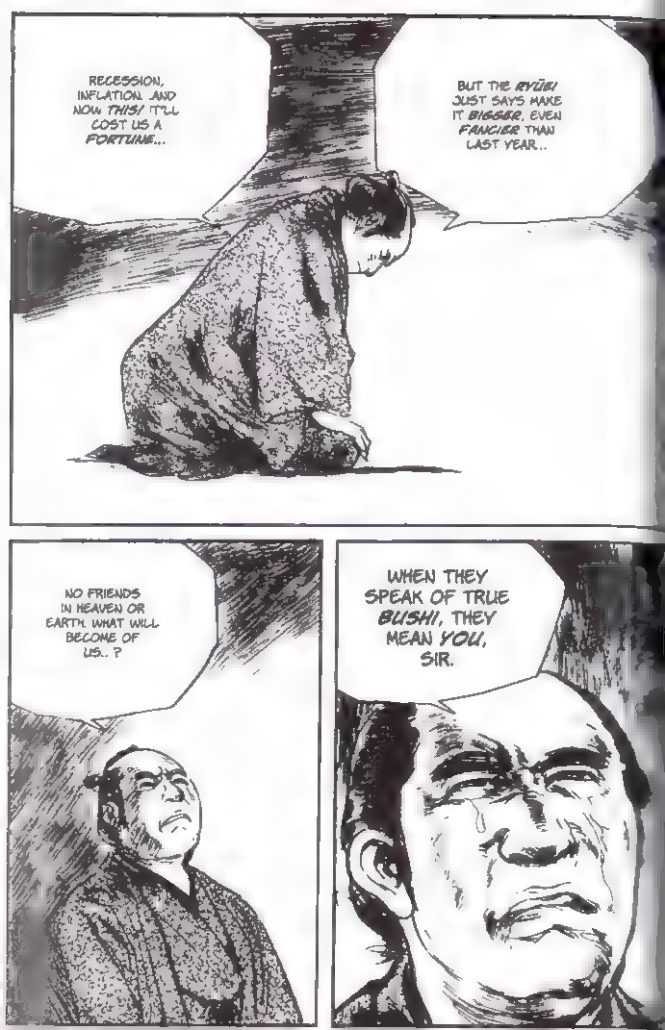

THE TRUTH IS THAT YOU DIDN'T TELL ME THIS.
IF YOU WANTED *ASSISTANCE*, THAT WOULD BE ONE THING.
BUT THIS REQUEST... A *FAVOR? REALLY*, SIR.
I'M USING IT FOR MY OWN ENDS. IT'S RIGHT TO ASK.

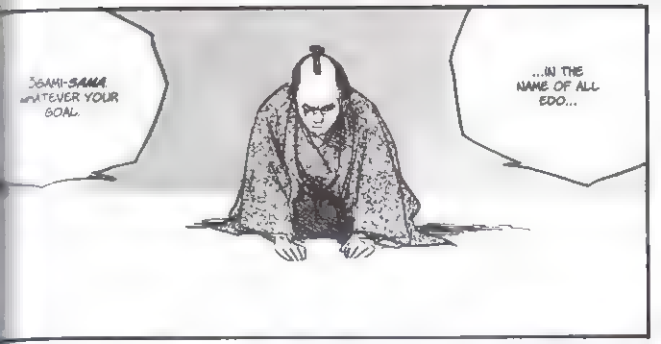
DO YOU ALLOW IT?
THE MATSURI BELONGS TO ALL EDO. LET HEAVEN JUDGE AS IT WILL.
MY THANKS.
PLEASE EXCUSE ME...
WA- PLEASE

I WOULD ASK YOU A FAVOR, SIR.
DURING THE GREAT FLOOD, SOMEONE BLEW UP SUMIYOSHI HILL TO BLOCK THE SHINKAWA RIVER.
THAT SAINT SAVED EDO FROM DISASTER.
AS MACHI-DOSHIYORI, I THANK HIM.

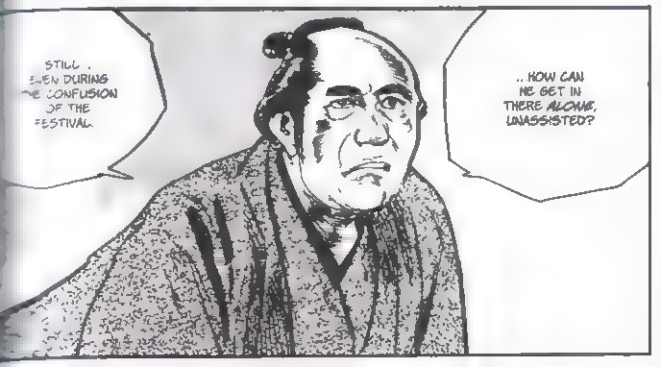
SHOULD HE ASK FOR MY HELP HOW COULD I POSSIBLY REFUSE?
HE SAVED THOUSANDS OF LIVES I'D DO ANYTHING
I CANNOT HELP YOU
MY APOLOGIES

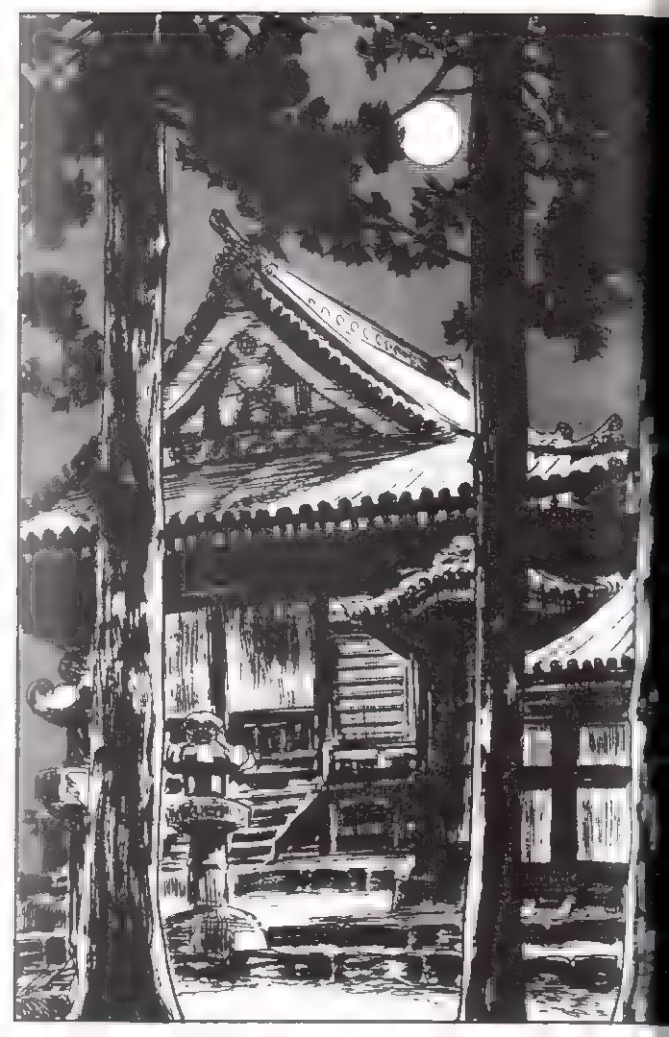

WHAT MANNER OF MAN...?
TO ME, WHO PULLED NAGASAKIYA FROM THE FLOOD? WHO HEARD EVERY-THING...
...OFFER ...HE'LL REFUSE
AND THEN TO COME AND APOLOGIZE... N CASE HIS PRESENCE CAUSES TROUBLE...
JUST FOR THAT KNOWING ...COULD BETRAY HIS SECRET.
IF THERE WERE ANY LIKE HIM AMONG THE G-BUKE, WE COULD HALT THE MATSURI...


RECESSION, INFLATION, AND NOW THIS! IT'LL COST US A FORTUNE...
BUT THE RYŪJI JUST SAYS MAKE IT BIGGER, EVEN FANCIER THAN LAST YEAR..
NO FRIENDS IN HEAVEN OR EARTH. WHAT WILL BECOME OF US..?
WHEN THEY SPEAK OF TRUE BUSHI, THEY MEAN YOU, SIR.


...IN THE NAME OF ALL EDO...
...WHATEVER YOUR GOAL.

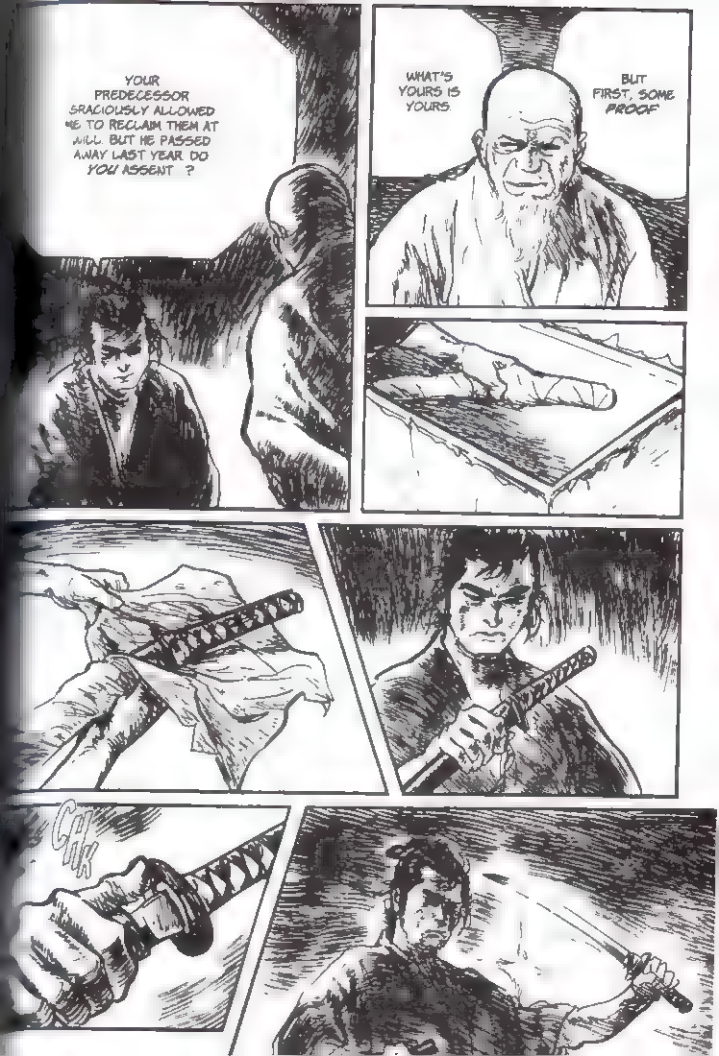
I THANK YOU FROM OUR HEARTS.


..HOW CAN HE GET IN THERE ALONE, UNASSISTED?
STILL, EVEN DURING THE CONFUSION OF THE FESTIVAL.



GCHK
SHRKK

WHAT'S ALL THIS, MA?
I AM ŌGAMI ITTŌ.
WHEN I WAS EXILED FOUR YEARS AGO.
I LEFT MY MONSEKI TO MY ANCESTORS
NOW I HAVE RESOLVED TO WEAR IT AGAIN.
PERHAPS I SHOULD HAVE ASKED FIRST BUT I FEARED I'D BRING YOU TROUBLE

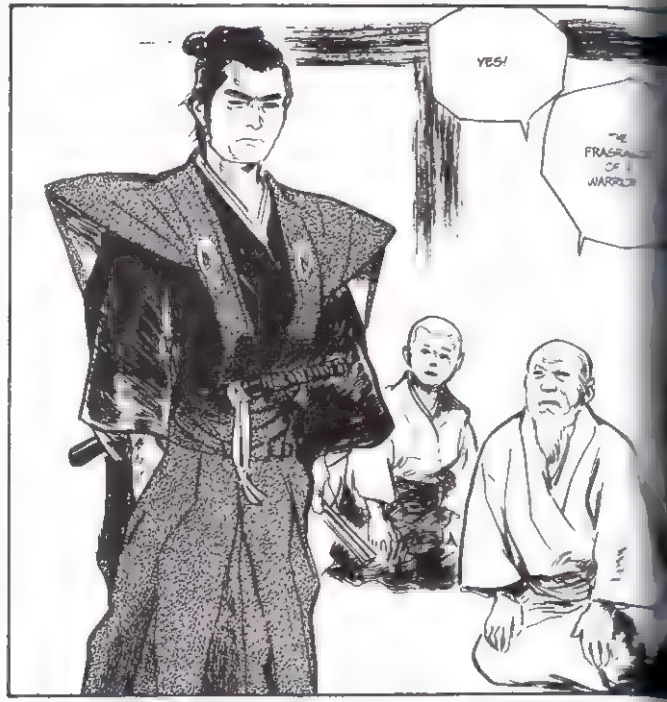

YOUR PREDECESSOR GRACIOUSLY ALLOWED ME TO RECLAIM THEM AT WILL. BUT HE PASSED AWAY LAST YEAR. DO YOU ASSENT ?
WHAT'S YOURS IS YOURS
BUT FIRST, SOME PROOF
CHK

MY PROOF ALLOW ME..
NAMU!

STOP! I SEE SUCH WILL! SUCH PERFECTION! SWORD AND AS ONE!
TOTAL FREEDOM!
REMARKABLE. FOUR YEARS IN THE EARTH, AND NO RUST PRESERVED WITH A WARRIOR'S HEART
THE SCENT OF A BUSHI...
WHEN DID I SMELL IT LAST?

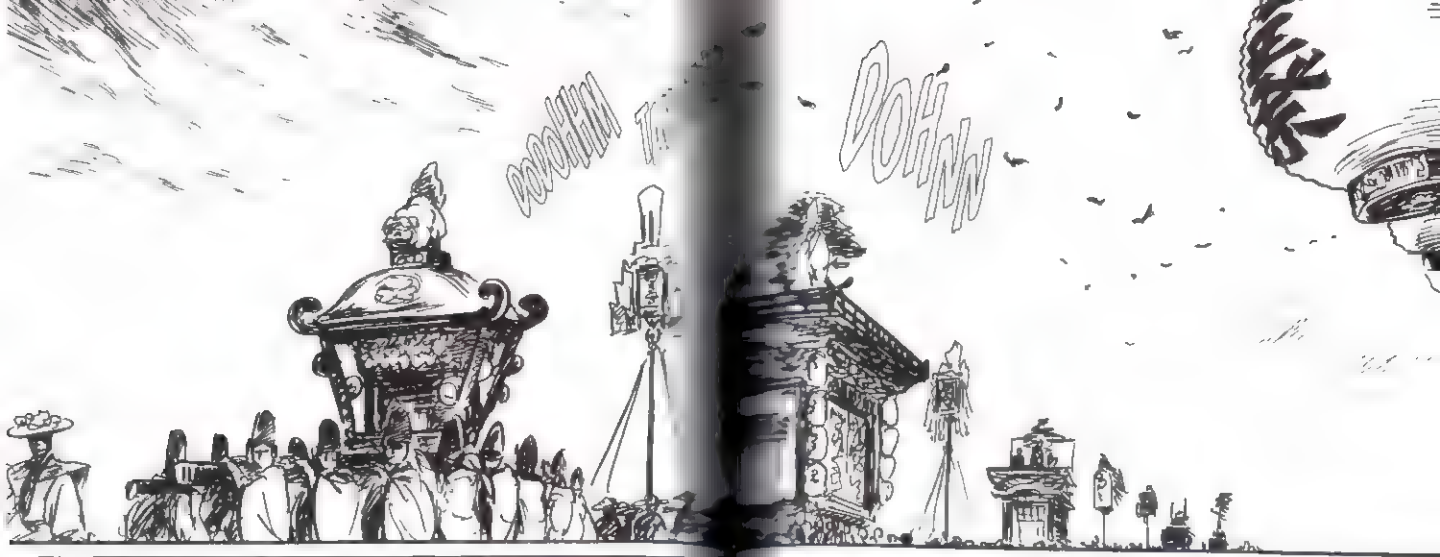
COME.
ONE WEARS THE MOMBSHŌ FOR DEATH AND BATTLE YOU MUST GO PREPARED

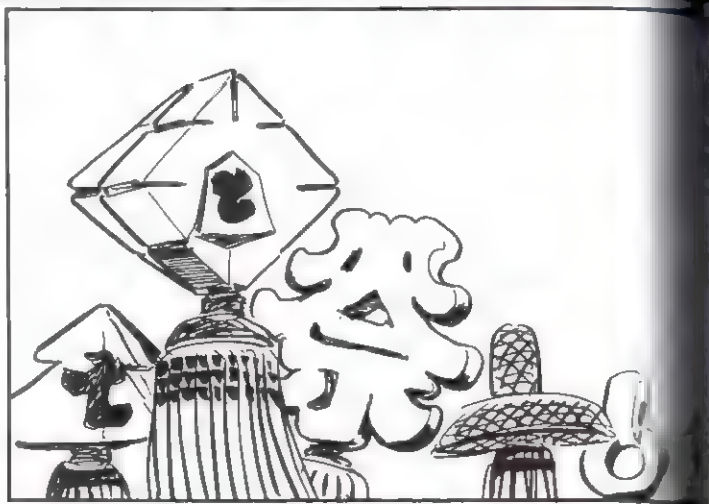
FFSST

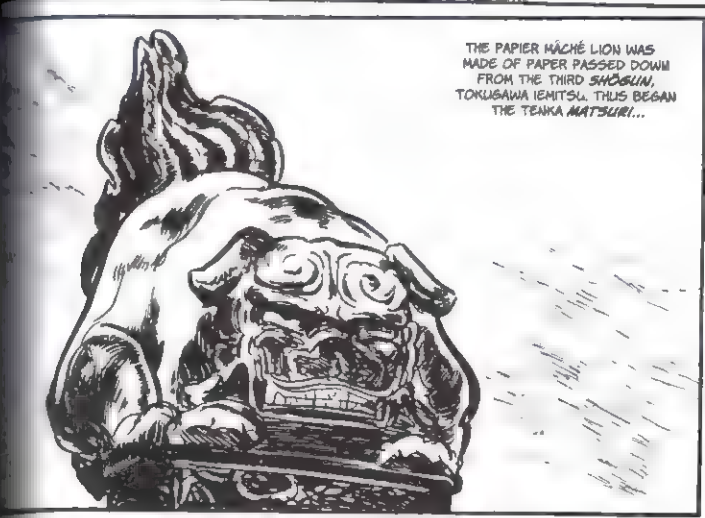

YES!
THE FRAGRANCE OF A WARRIOR

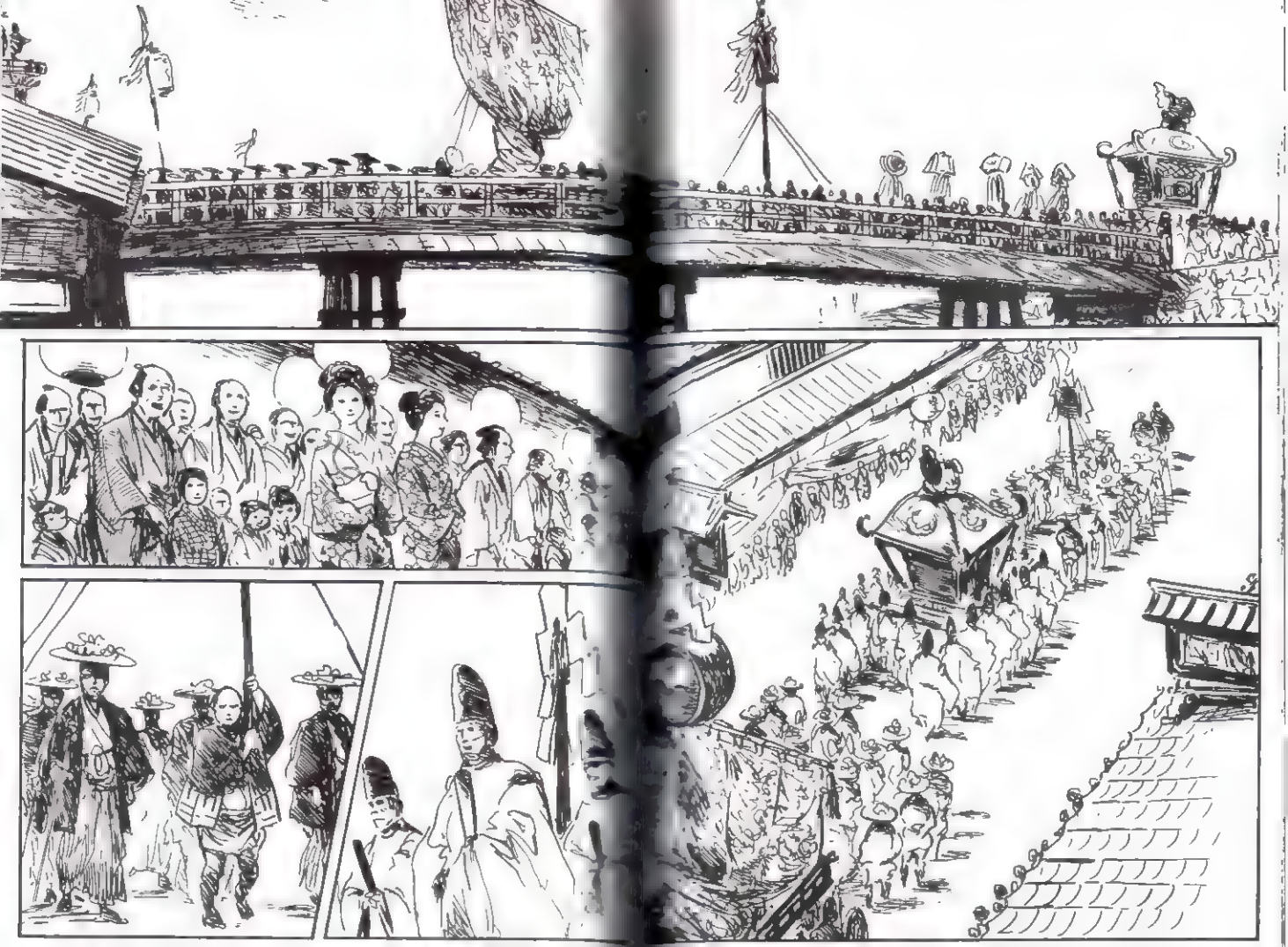
MY THANKS.
WE'LL NOT MEET AGAIN IN THIS LIFE, BUT I'LL REMEMBER THIS FOR SEVEN LIVES TO COME.

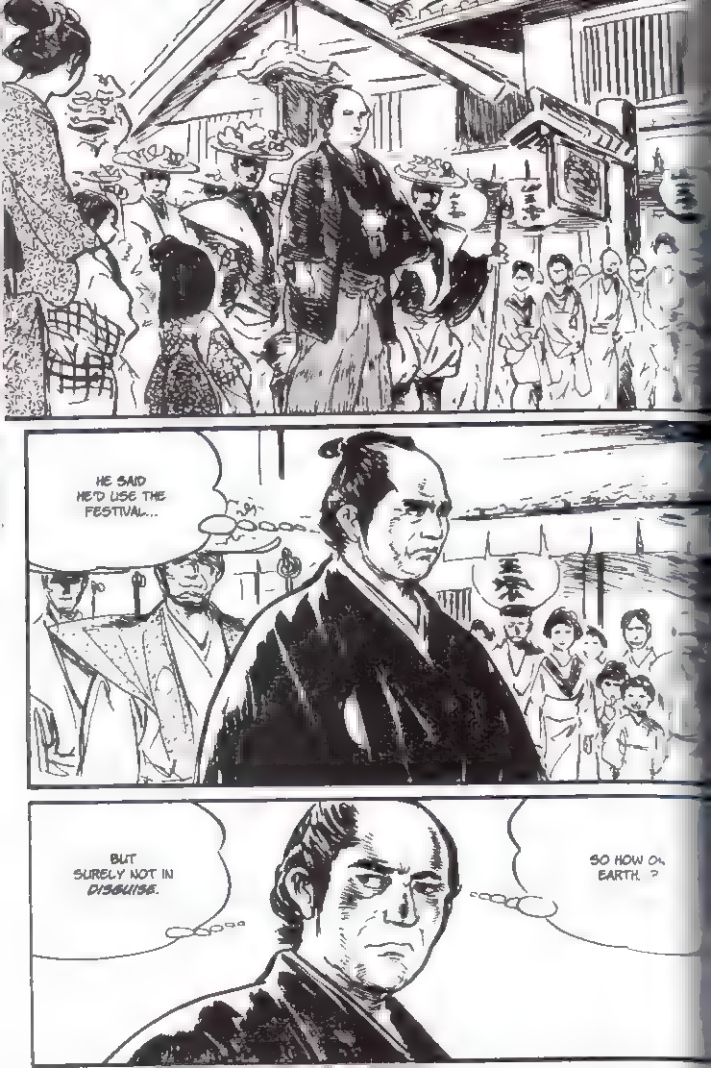
...SUCH A FRESHING COME AND ...RE THE ...OON
AND TOMORROW... THE MATSURI.
OHM
OHM
OHM
山王大祭
*SANNŌ FESTIVAL

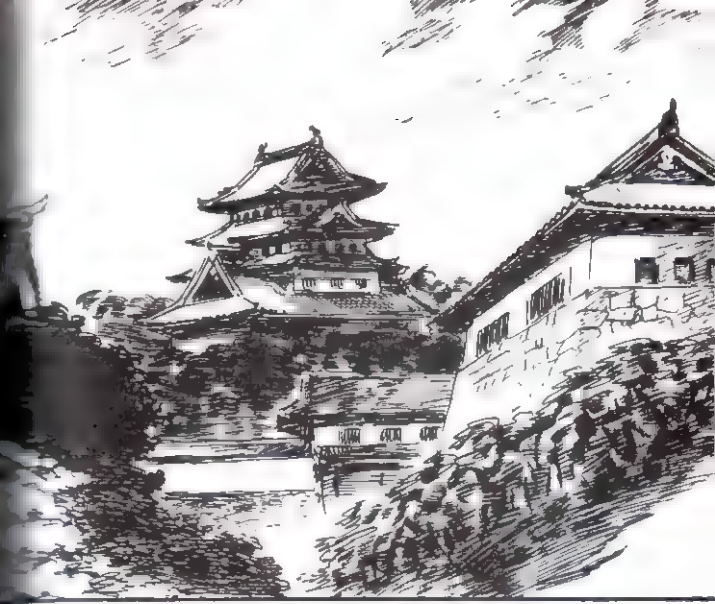

WOOSH
POHN



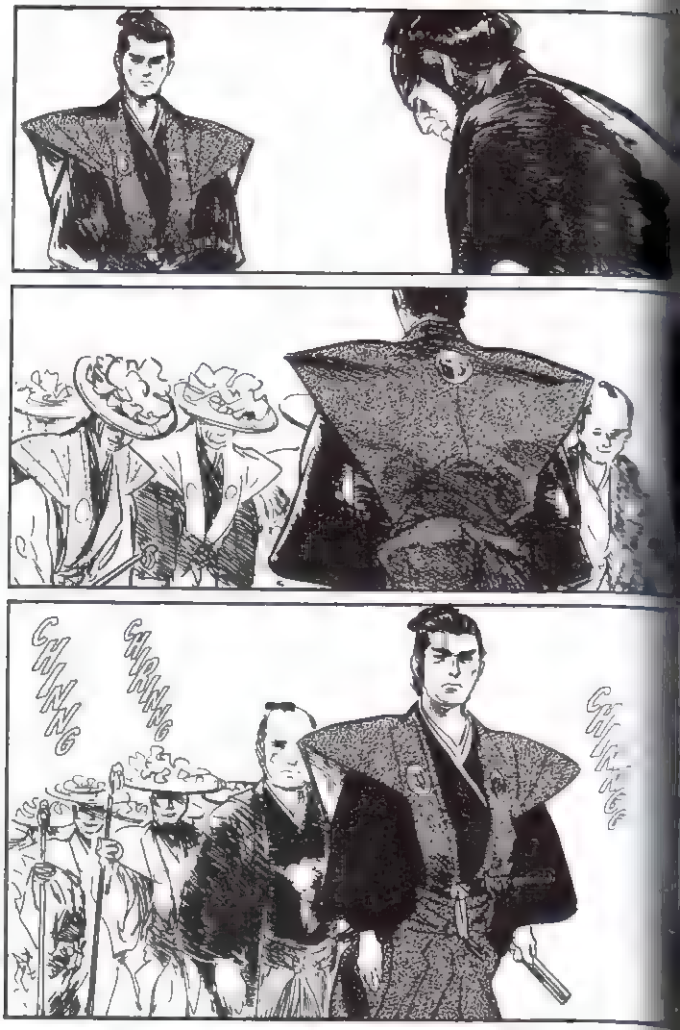

THE PAPIER MÂCHÉ LION WAS MADE OF PAPER PASSED DOWN FROM THE THIRD SHŌGUN, TOKUGAWA IEMITSU. THUS BEGAN THE TENKA MATSURI...

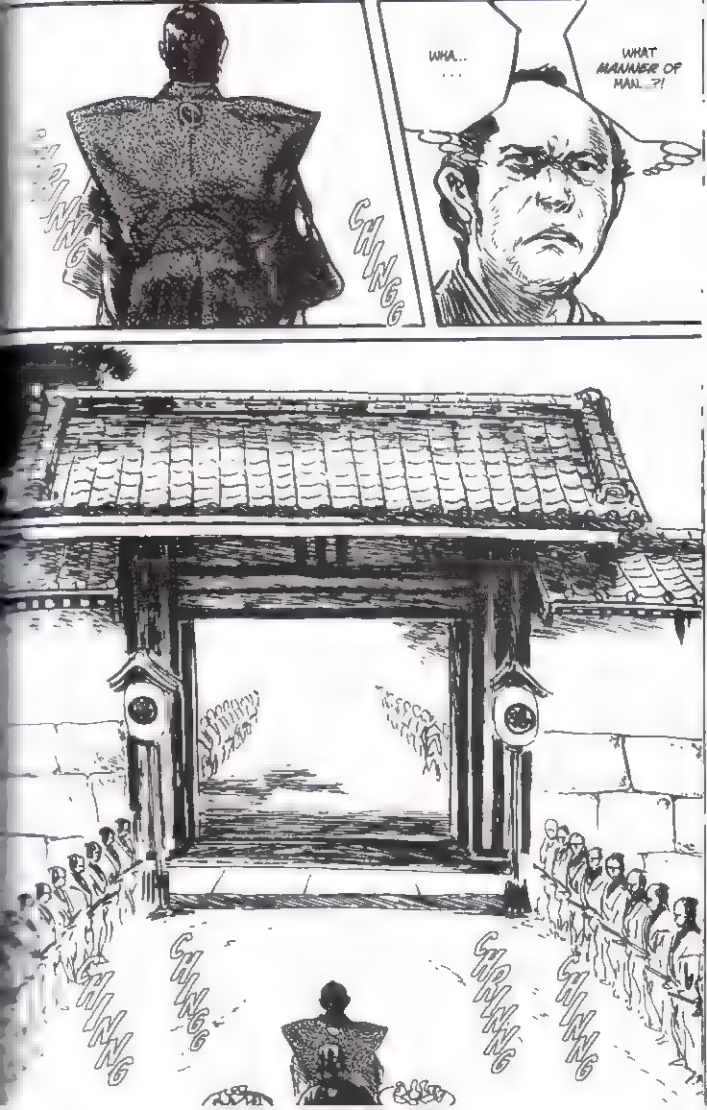


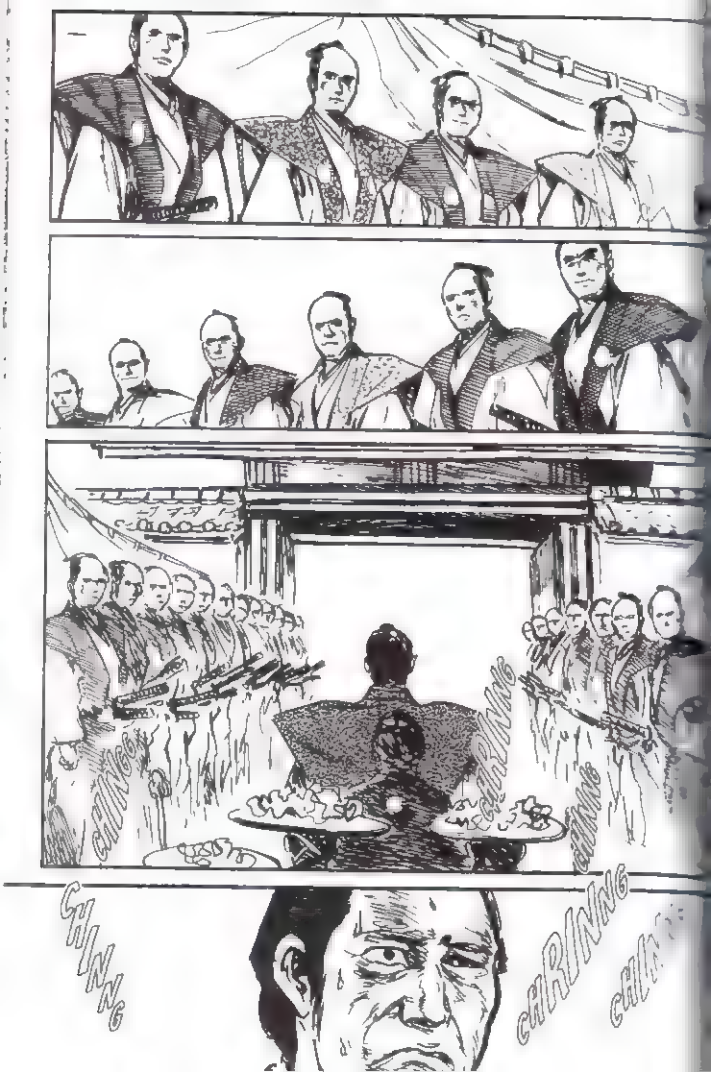

HE SAID HE'D USE THE FESTIVAL...
BUT SURELY NOT IN DISGUISE.
SO HOW ON EARTH...?

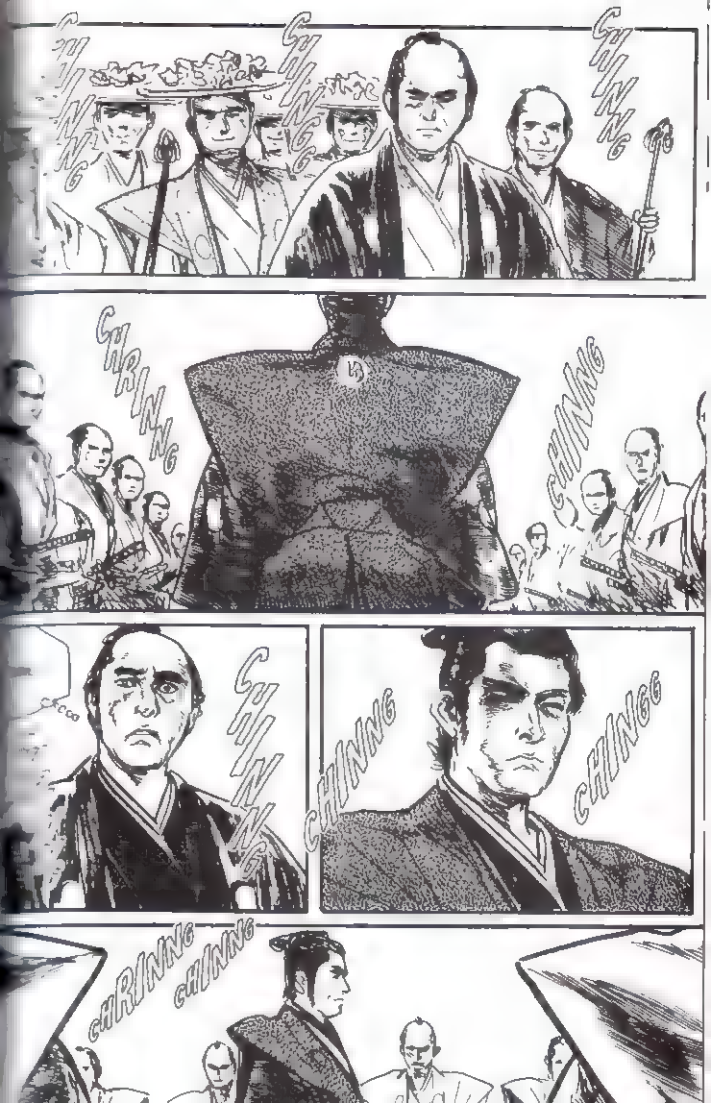


CHRING
CHING
CHING
CHING

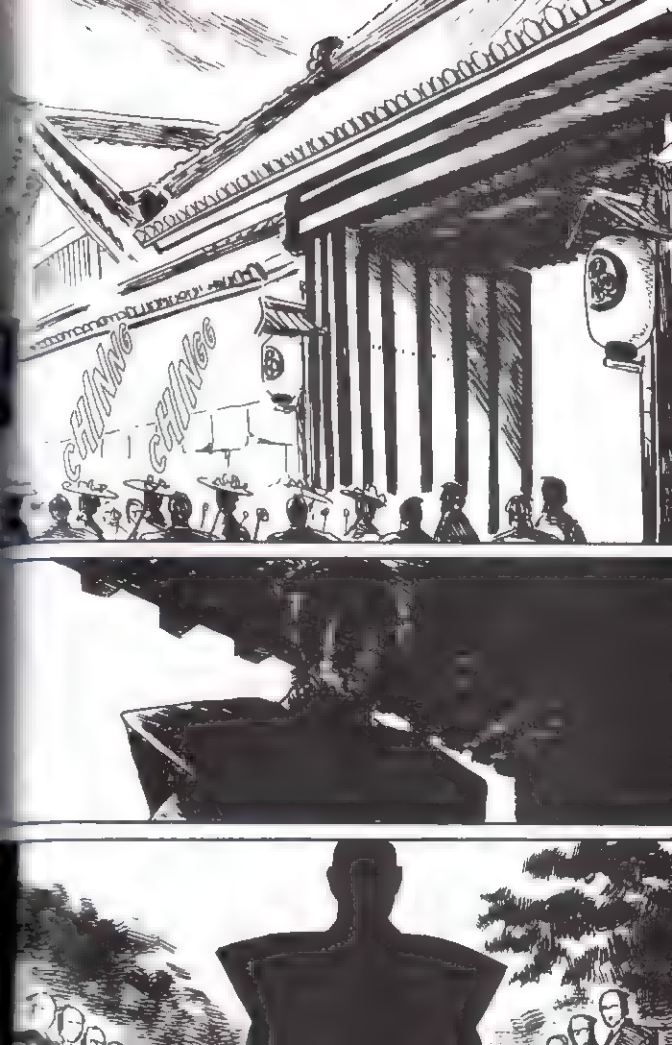

GUNNG
GUNNG
GUNNG


WHA...
...
WHAT MANNER OF MAN...?!
SHING
SHING
SHING
SHING
SHING
SHING
SHING


CHING
CHING
CHING
CHING
CHING


CHINNG
CHINNG
CHINNG
CHRINNG
CHINNG
CHINNG
CHINNG
CHINNG
CHRINNG
CHINNG

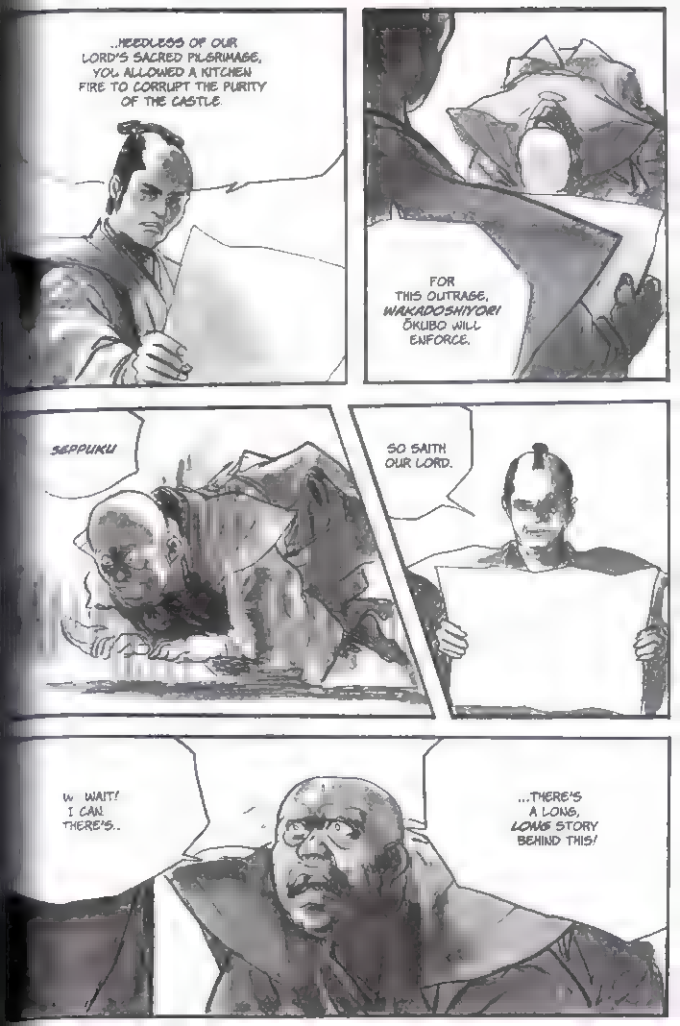
CHINGG
CHING
WHAT. WHAT AN INCREDIBLE MAN!
EVEN THE SAMURAI DON'T DOUBT HIM. THEY BOW...
SO NATURAL, SO REFINED... HE MAKES THEM BOW. .
NO.. NOT THAT
IT'S WHERE HE IS. HIS SOUL IN A SPACE BEYOND LIFE AND DEATH


CHING CHING

the hundred and thirty-first

Great Reversals

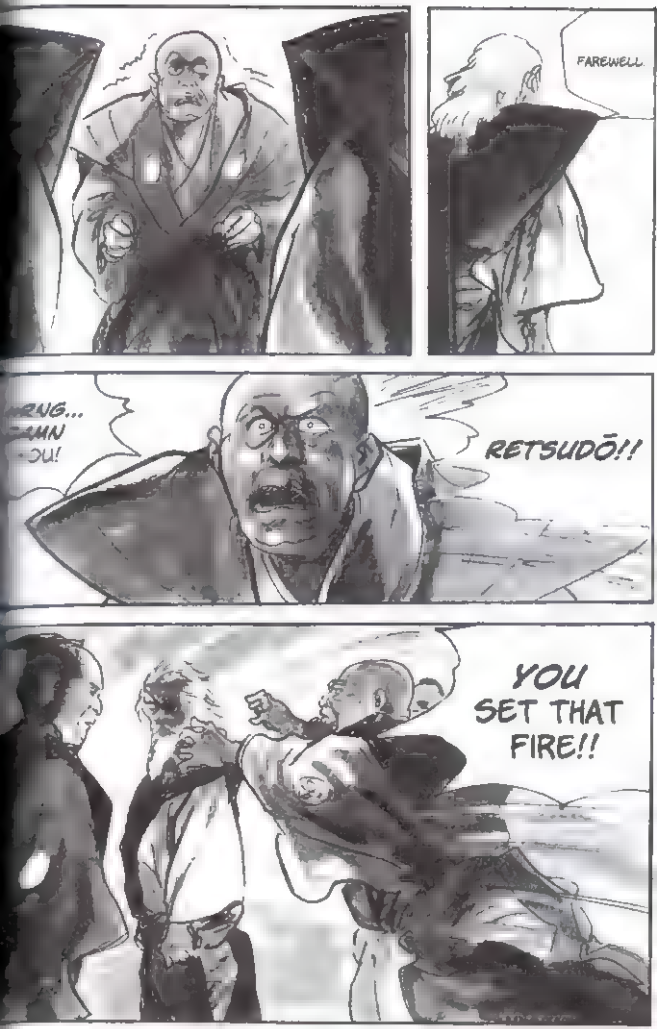
OUR LORD'S WILL! LISTEN WELL!
I, I OBEY!
ABE TANOMO OF THE SERVERS AND TASTERS...


..HEEDLESS OF OUR LORD'S SACRED PILGRIMAGE, YOU ALLOWED A KITCHEN FIRE TO CORRUPT THE PURITY OF THE CASTLE.
FOR THIS OUTRAGE, WAKADOSHIYORI ŌKUBO WILL ENFORCE.
SEPPUKU
SO SAITH OUR LORD.
W- WAIT! I CAN THERE'S..
...THERE'S A LONG, LONG STORY BEHIND THIS!

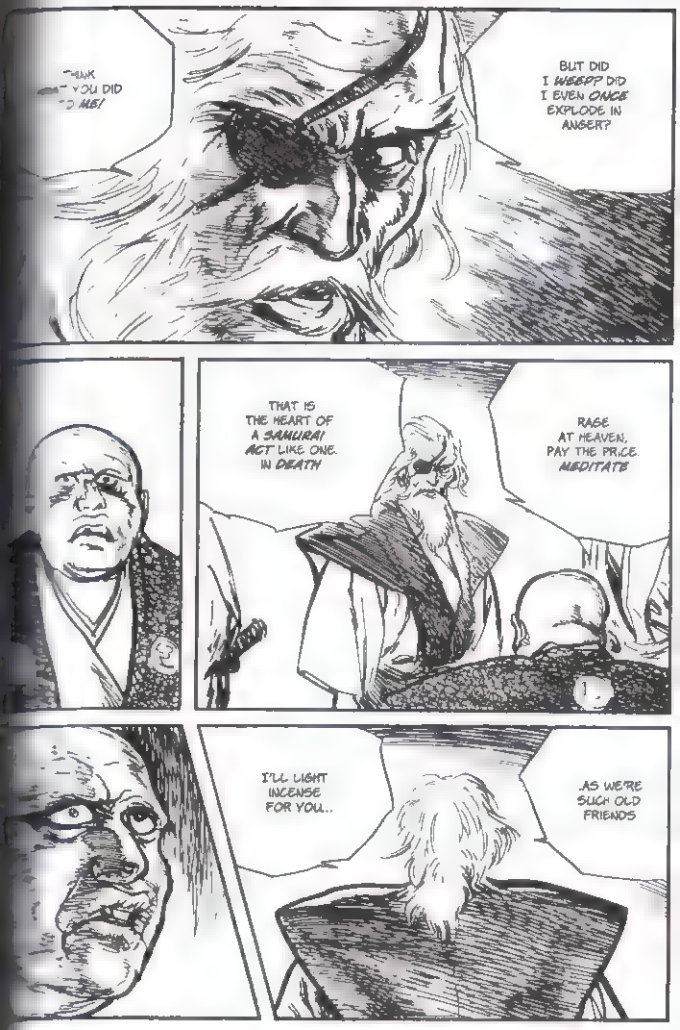
AS I'VE HUMBLY EXPLAINED, RETSUDŌ.
THAT DAMNED RETSUDŌ.
SILENCE! OUR LORD HAS SPOKEN!
FWAP

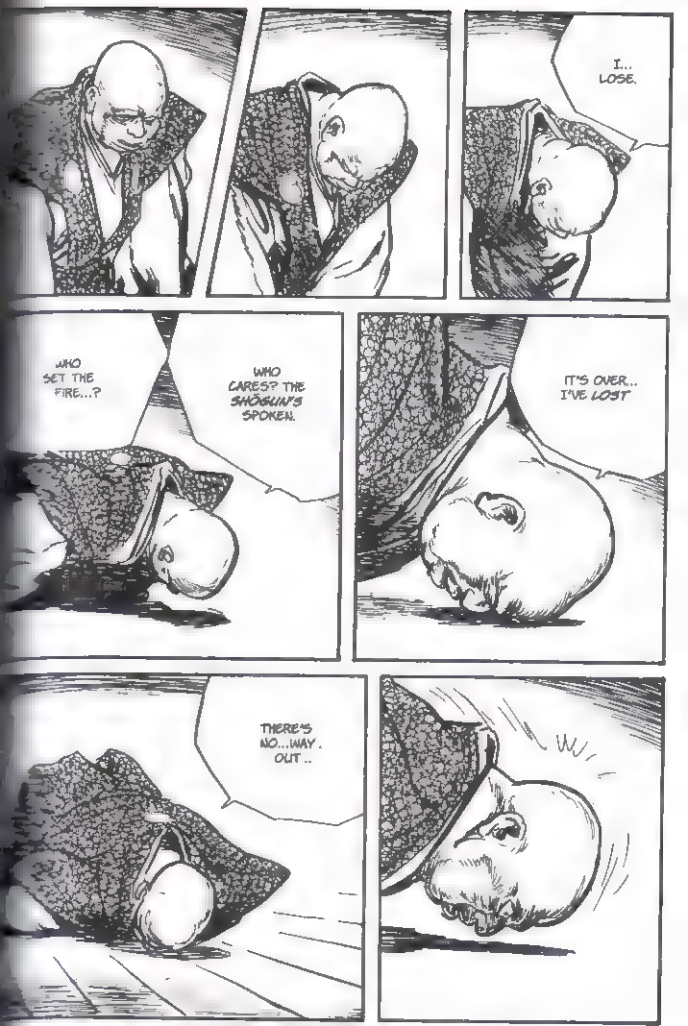
AAH!!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR *HOSPITALITY*, KAII.
BUT NOW IT'S THE TENKA FESTIVAL. I'M BEING TRANSFERRED TO THE *GO-RŌJŪ*'S QUARTERS.

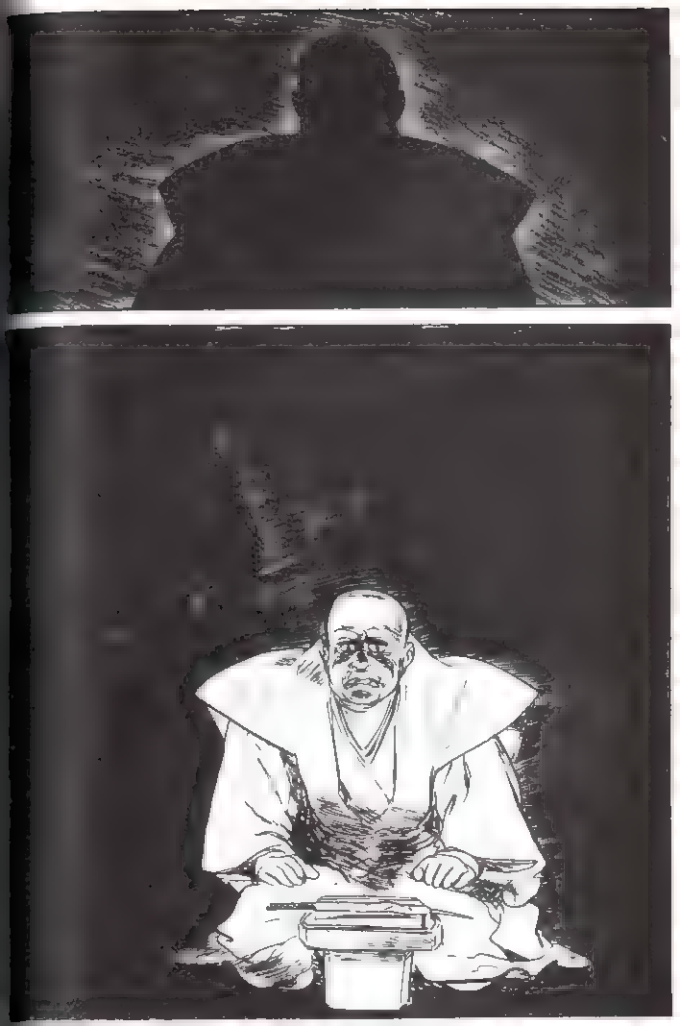

FAREWELL
RETSUDŌ!!
YOU SET THAT FIRE!!

BACK, WORM!!
DISGUSTING
IF IT WASN'T YOU...
.THEN WHY TEACH ME SEPPUKU BEFORE IT STARTED, EH?!
YOU FRAMED ME RETSUDO


BUT DID I WEEP? DID I EVEN ONCE EXPLODE IN ANGER?
THAT IS THE HEART OF A SAMURAI! ACT LIKE ONE. IN DEATH
RAGE AT HEAVEN, PAY THE PRICE. MEDITATE
I'LL LIGHT INCENSE FOR YOU..
AS WE'RE SUCH OLD FRIENDS


I... LOSE.
WHO SET THE FIRE...?
WHO CARES? THE SHŌGUN'S SPOKEN.
IT'S OVER.. I'VE LOST
THERE'S NO...WAY. OUT..

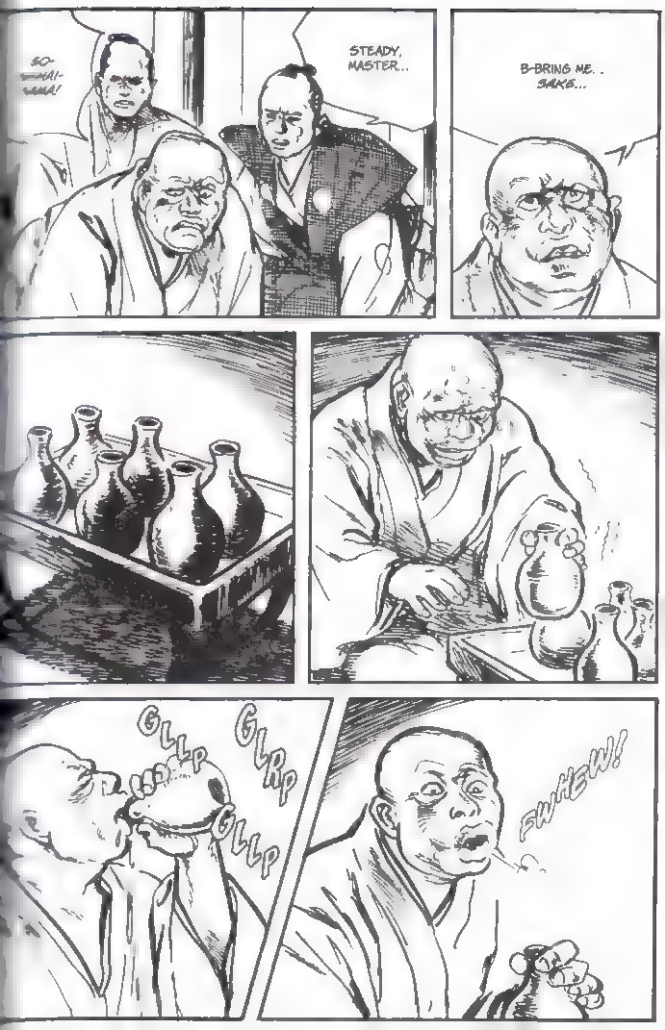
SEPPUKU...?
MEP! CUT MY OWN
BELLY...?!
THE WAY
RETSUDO
SHOWED
ME ?
AHH HA HA
BELLY
C-CUT IT .
HEEE..!



AH. AH.
AAHH!!

THUD
A DREAM. LET IT BE A DREAM!
TELL ME I'M DREAMING..

IT'S.
NOT A DREAM..?
IT'S REALLY
HAPPENING?
I MUST DO..
SEPPUKU
SEPPUKU
MEANS ~~
MY TUMMY
MASTER. THE
WAKADOSHIYORI'S
PALANQUIN COMES
AT SIX PM..
OH GOD
OH GOD
OH GOD ..!


SO-
STEADY, MASTER..
B-BRING ME. . SAKE...
GLLP
GLRP
GLLP
FWHEW!

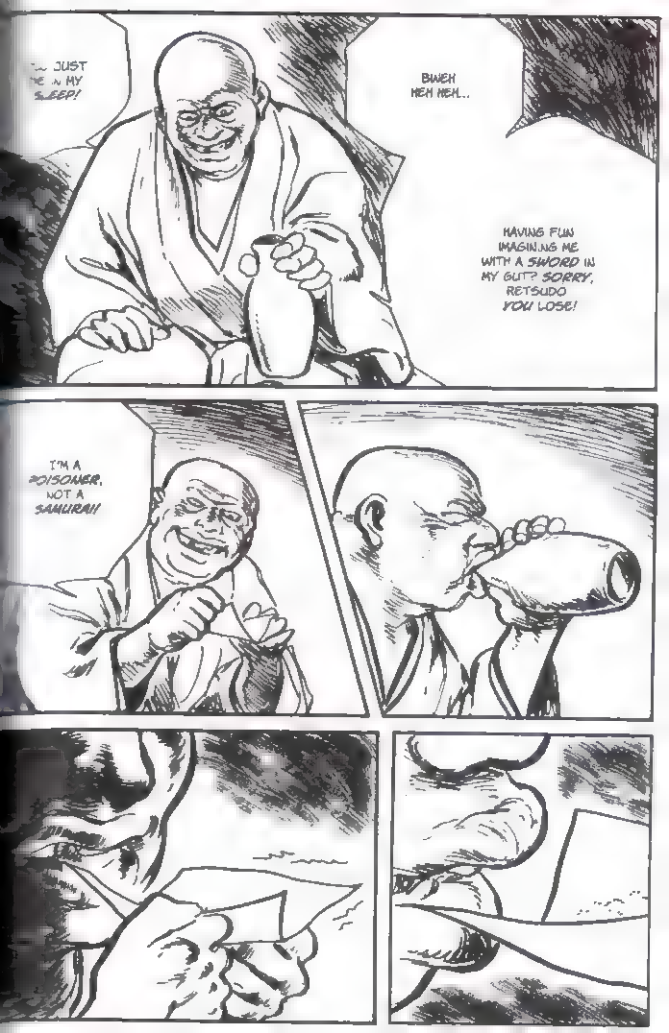
IF YOU... IMBIBE TOO MUCH, SIR WHEN THE PALANQUIN ARRIVES
HIC!
PHEW!
GLGG GLUP

WE'RE CERTAIN RETSUDÓ DID SET THAT FIRE, SIR AND WHEN HE LEFT, HE LOOKED AT YOU AND CALLED YOU..
"PITIFUL
HUH .? WHADDJA SAY?
RETSUDŌ, SIR HE CALLED YOU.. "PITIFUL."

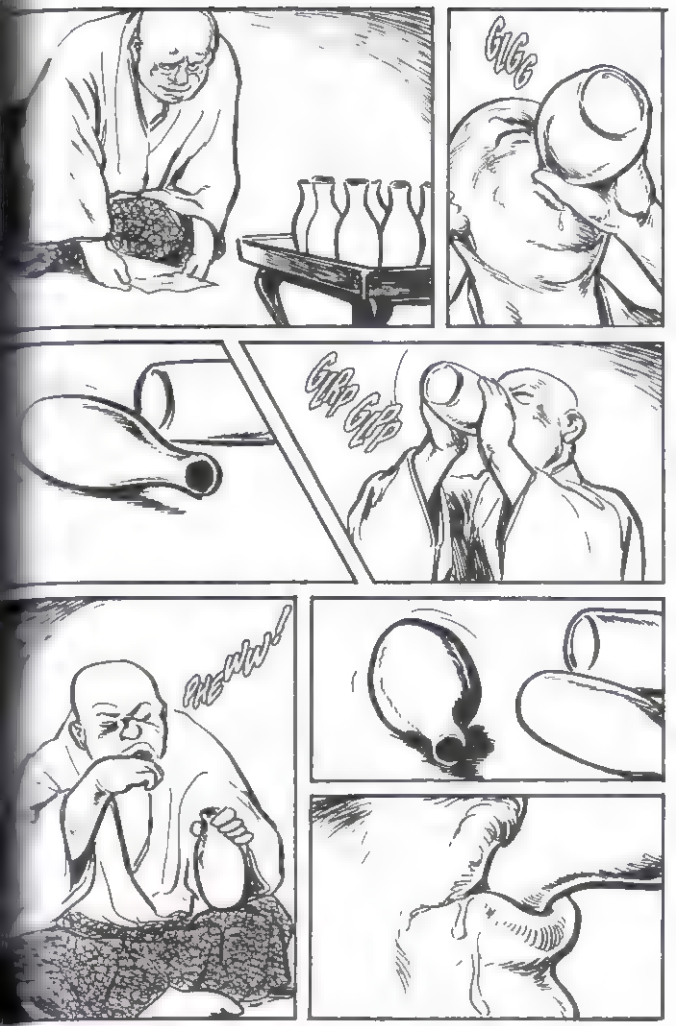
ME. ?
PITIFUL...?
HE CALLED ME THAT. ?
HA HA HA
BWAH HAW HAW HAW!
NYAHH HAH HAH HAH HAH!

E THINKS
... PLAY
S GAME?!
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
ABE TANOSHI?!
OUR LORD'S
TASTER?!
THE WORLD'S
GREATEST
POISONER?!
ORE
SAKE!
RIGHT
NOW!
I SAID
OUT!

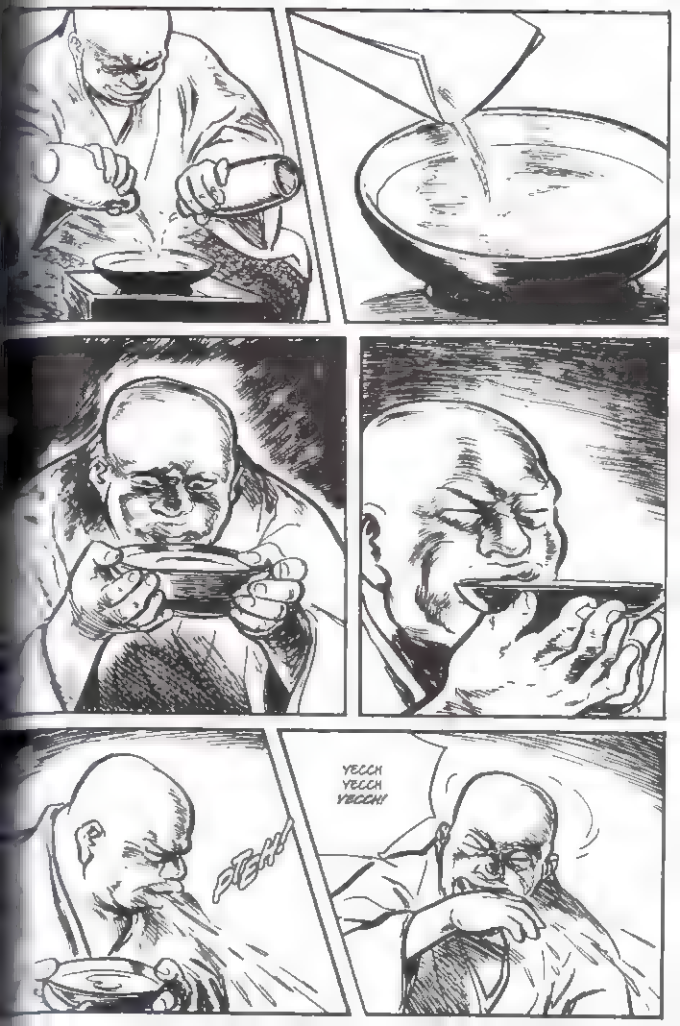
HEH. IF RETSUDŌ THE GREATEST SWORDSMAN I'M THE GREA POISONER' SEPPUKU GOT ME A BI UPSET
BUT THE HELL I CUT THIS BELLY OF MINE! NOT FOR YOUR AMUSEMENT, RETSUDŌ!
I'LL DRINK MY OWN POISON BY GOD
KNIFE TO THE TUM-TUM? TOO SCARY!
BUT POISON? NOTHING TO IT!


...JUST ME IN MY SLEEP!
BWEH HEH HEH...
HAVING FUN IMAGINING ME WITH A SWORD IN MY GUT? SORRY, RETSUDO YOU LOSE!
I'M A POISONER, NOT A SAMURAI!

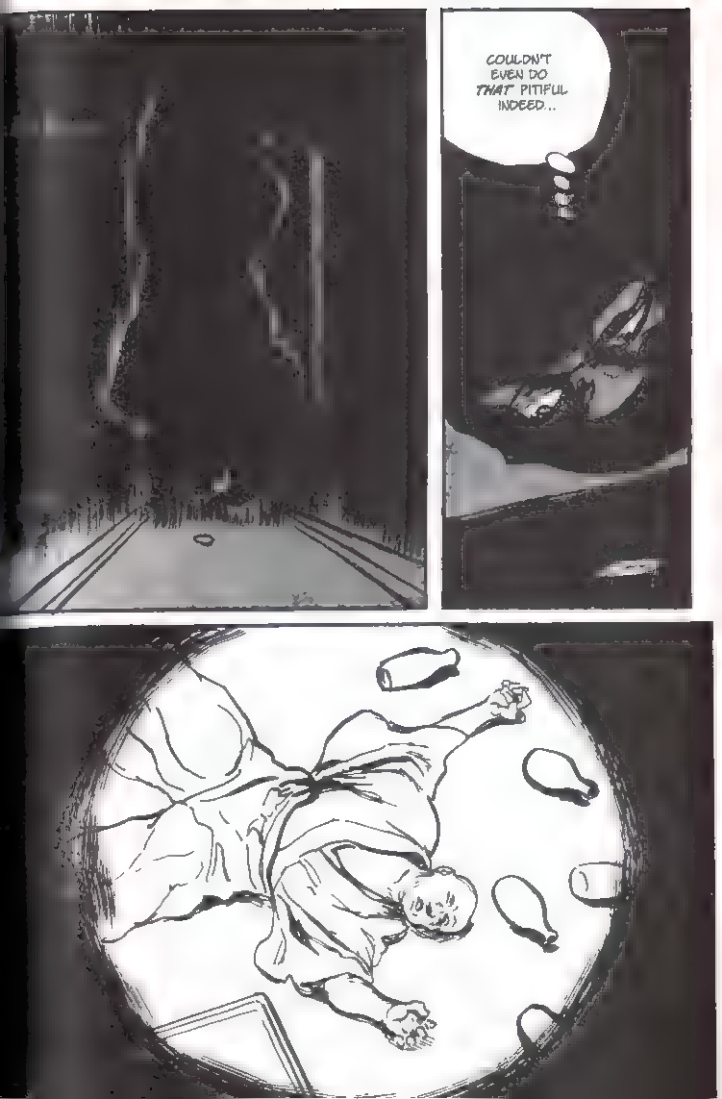
GLRP


GUGG
GUP GUP
AHHH!

NAG.

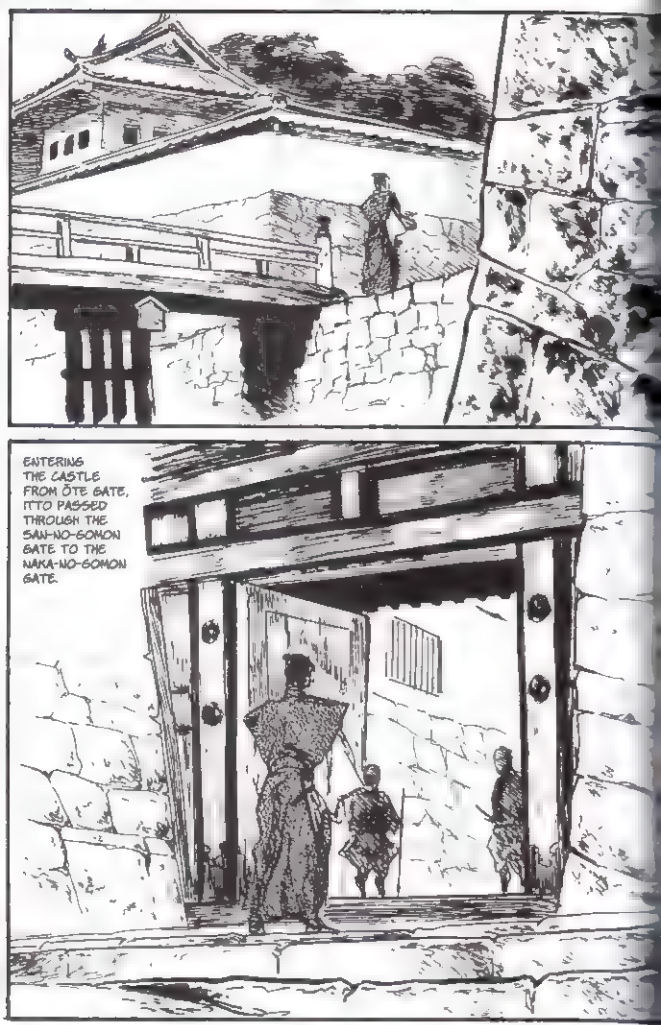

PTEH!
YECCH
YECCH
YECCH!

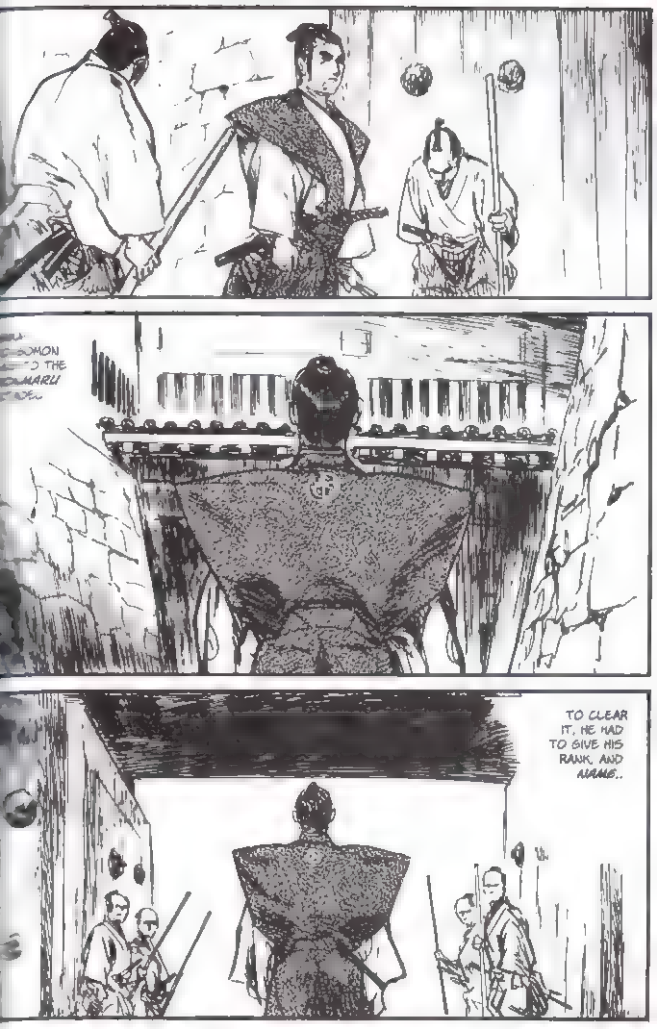
GLARGGL
AIIEEE!
I DON'T WANNA DIE!


COULDN'T EVEN DO *THAT* PITIFUL INDEED..

SNRRRGK
GZNK
ZZNNXX

GZ
SNRRK

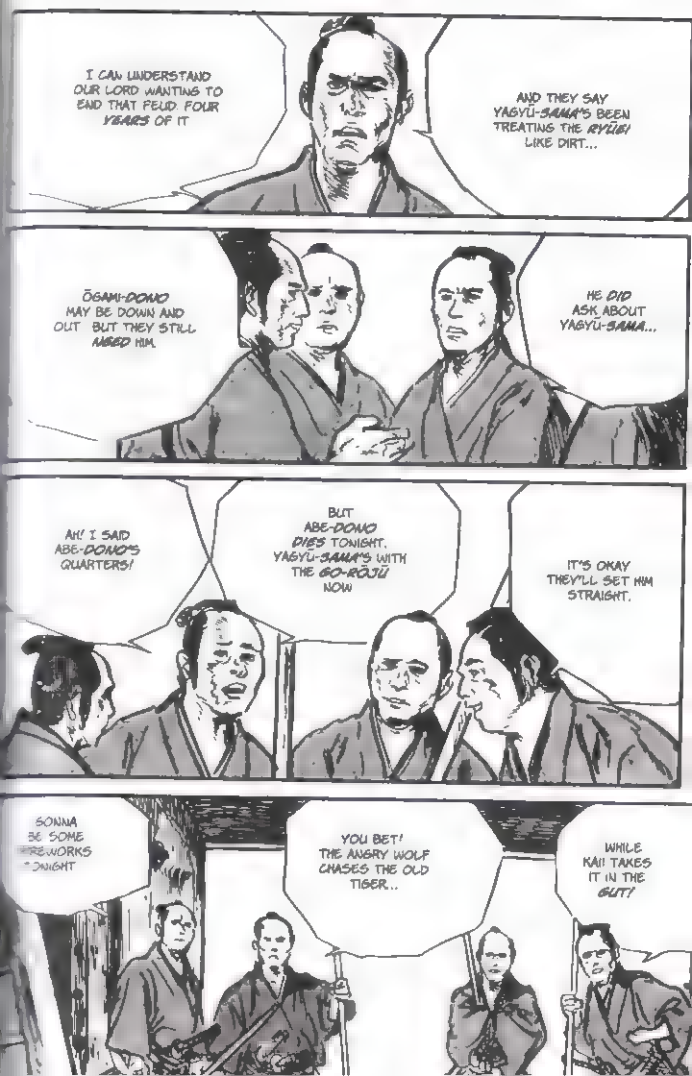

ENTERING THE CASTLE FROM ŌTE GATE, ITTO PASSED THROUGH THE SAN-NO-GOMON GATE TO THE NAKA-NO-GOMON GATE.

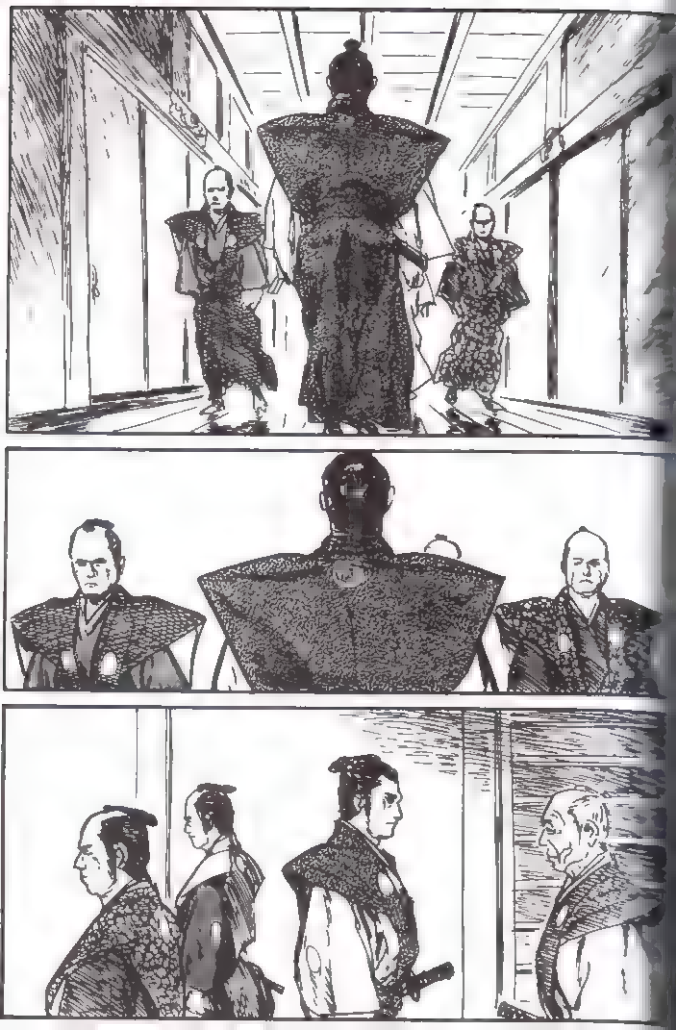

...SOMON
...D THE
...OMARU
...ADE..
TO CLEAR IT, HE HAD TO GIVE HIS RANK, AND ARMS..

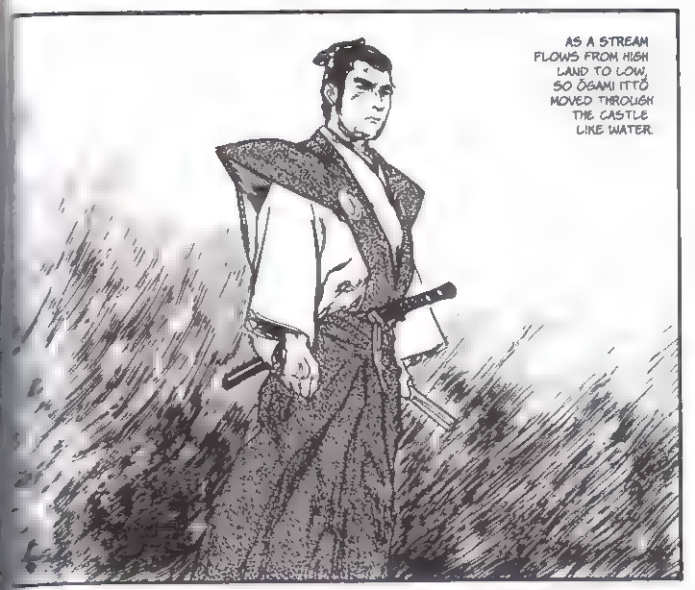
FORMER KŌSHI KAISHAKUJIJIN, ŌGAKI ITTŌ.
WELCOME, SIR. YOU MAY PASS.
WHERE'S YABYŪ-DONO?
IN ABE-DONO'S QUARTERS, SIR.

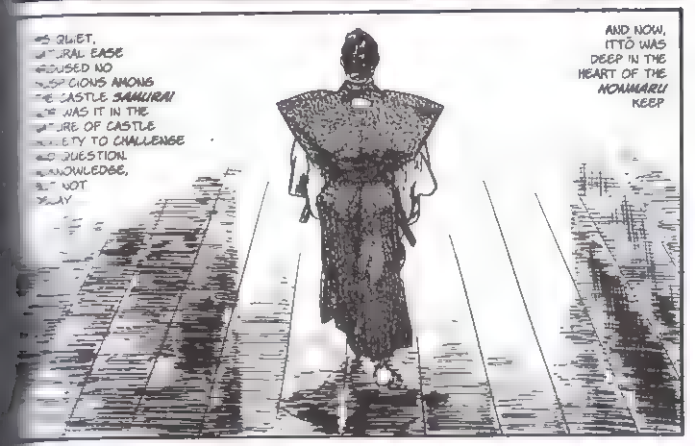
....
...P!
....
...P!
KŌGI SASHAKUNIN ..?
THAT'S WHAT HE SAID.
ŌGAMI ITTŌ-DONO ŌGAMI WHERE'D I-
HOOO HOO!
F HE'S ŌGAMI ITTŌ. !
NOT.. THAT ŌGAMI?!
THAT'S CRAZY! WE MUST HAVE HEARD HIM WRONG!

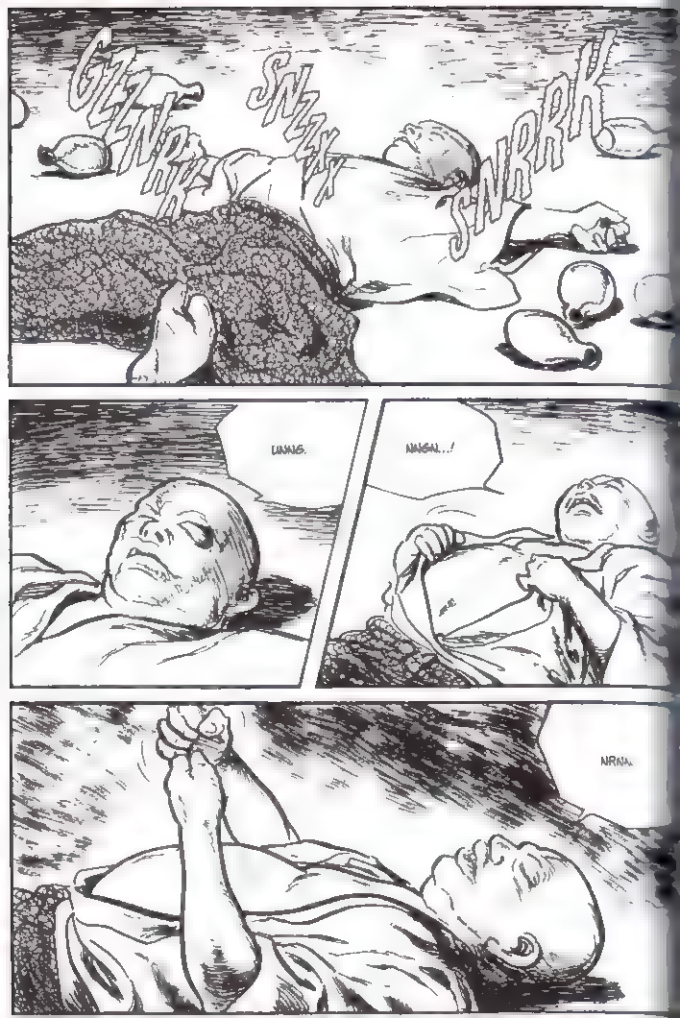
HE ACTED SO NATURAL...
HOLD ON, GUYS.
MAYBE IT WAS ŌGAMI-DONO
SO WHAT?
YOU HEARD IT, TOO, RIGHT? THE SHŌGUN HIMSELF SAID YAGYŪ SAMA AND ŌGAMI-DONO SHOULD MEET IN THE CASTLE.
OH, YEAH.
YEAH. NOW I REMEMBER
AND ABE-DONO WAS SUPPOSED TO BRING HIM.
UH-HUH.
BUT NOW ABE-DONO'S GOING TO YOU KNOW.
SO ŌGAMI-DONO SLIPS IN ALONE.
'CAUSE IT'S ALL HUSH-HUSH... RIGHT?

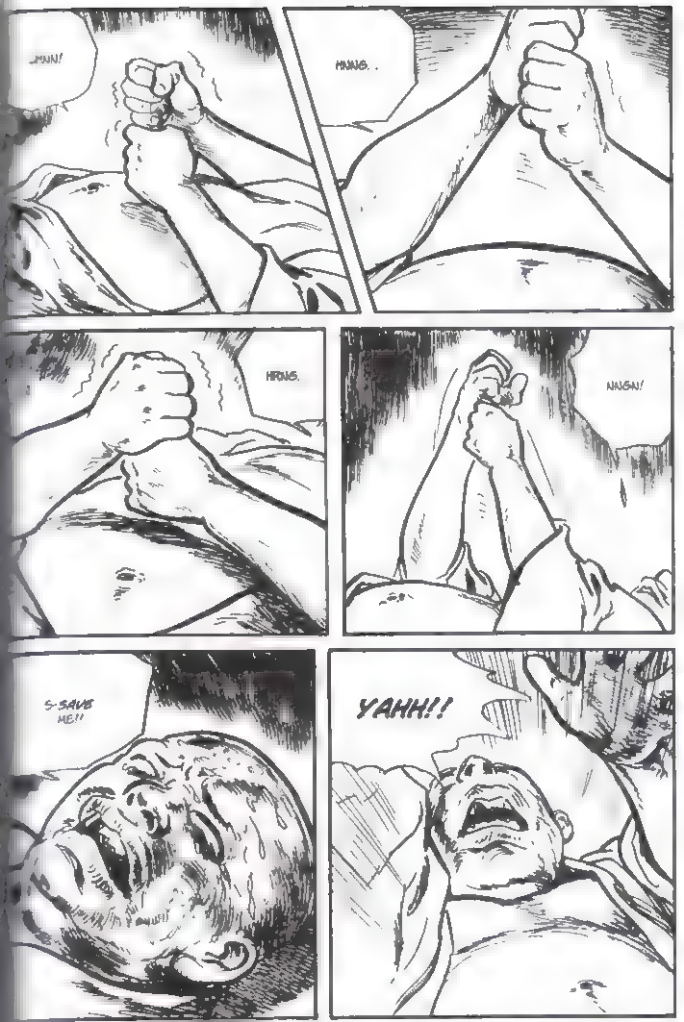

I CAN UNDERSTAND OUR LORD WANTING TO END THAT FEUD FOUR YEARS OF IT
AND THEY SAY YAGYŪ-SAMA'S BEEN TREATING THE RYŪJI LIKE DIRT...
ŌGAMI-DONO MAY BE DOWN AND OUT BUT THEY STILL NEED HIM.
HE DID ASK ABOUT YAGYŪ-SAMA...
AH! I SAID ABE-DONO'S QUARTERS!
BUT ABE-DONO DIES TONIGHT. YAGYŪ-SAMA'S WITH THE GO-RŌJŪ NOW
IT'S OKAY THEY'LL SET HIM STRAIGHT.
SONNA BE SOME IRE-WORKS TONIGHT
YOU BET! THE ANGRY WOLF CHASES THE OLD TIGER..
WHILE KAJI TAKES IT IN THE GUT!



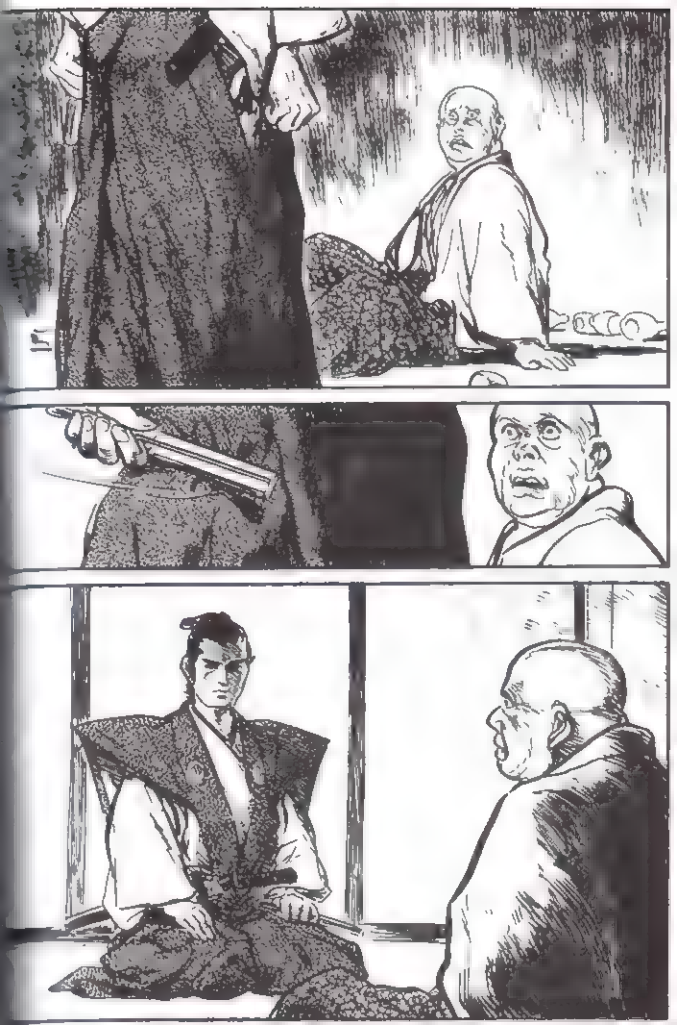

AS A STREAM FLOWS FROM HIGH LAND TO LOW, SO ŌGAMI ITTŌ MOVED THROUGH THE CASTLE LIKE WATER.


AND NOW, ITTŌ WAS DEEP IN THE HEART OF THE *HONMARU* KEEP


GZZNRR
SNZZX
SNRRR
UHHG.
HNGH...!
NRHH.


JHUH!
HNNG. .
HRNG.
NNNGH!
S-SAVE ME!!
YAHH!!

AAAAA--?!
D DREAMING?
BUT, BUT SOON... THE DREAM COMES..
. TRUE!
KSSH



ARE YOU A DREAM, TOO?
ABE TANOSHI-DONO, WAS IT NOT? I HAVE A QUESTION FOR YOU.
....
....
WHERE IS YAGYŪ RETSUDŌ?
NNG
OUCH

AUGH!!
Ō-ŌGAMI ITTŌ!!
WH-WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?!
WHERE IS ASTYUDŌ?!
IN THE SOUTH CHAMBER... THE GO-RŌJŪ'S ROOMS.
WHEN THE TENKA FESTIVAL'S OVER, THEY'LL MOVE HIM AGAIN.

MY APOLOGIES FOR DISTURBING YOU.
W-WAIT! DON'T GO!
HELP ME! SAVE ME!
I BEG YOU! RESCUE ME!
THERE WAS A KITCHEN FIRE! WHEN OUR LORD WENT TO TOSHOGU !!

SO I'VE GOT TO DO . SEPPUKU...
BUT... RETSUDÔ SET THE FIRE!
TO DESTROY ME! HE PLANNED IT!
PLEASE, SIR!
YOU COMING.. THIS MUST BE FATE. SANSAI, RIGHT?!
I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU GOT HERE, BUT..
..YOU CAN LEAVE THE SAME WAY!

I..I BEG YOU.
TAKE ME WITH YOU.
I MEAN IT!!
RETSUDŌ'S YOUR SWORN ENEMY!
IF IF YOU RESCUE ME... I'LL TELL YOU RETSUDŌ'S.. MOST SHOCKING SECRETS!
BETRAYING OUR LORD TRAMPLING THE HOLLYHOCK CREST..

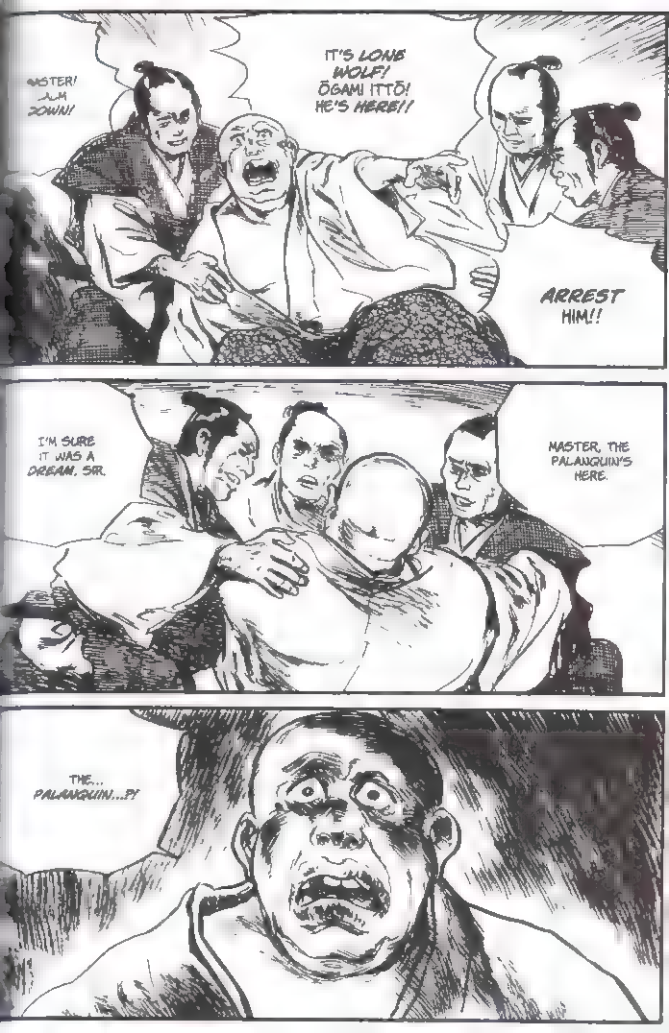
THAT'S WHY THE GO-RŌJŪ HAVE HIM!
OUR LORD ORDERED IT!
OUR LORD WANTS YOU TO FACE HIM.. IT'S YOUR BEST CHANCE!
I'LL TELL YOU ABOUT HIS WEAKNESSES. THE YAGYŪ LETTERS..
IT'LL BE YOUR SECRET WEAPON! BURY RETSUDŌ! REBUILD YOUR CLAN!
SO IT WAS YOU WHO STOLE THE WORM WRITINGS?
ULP!

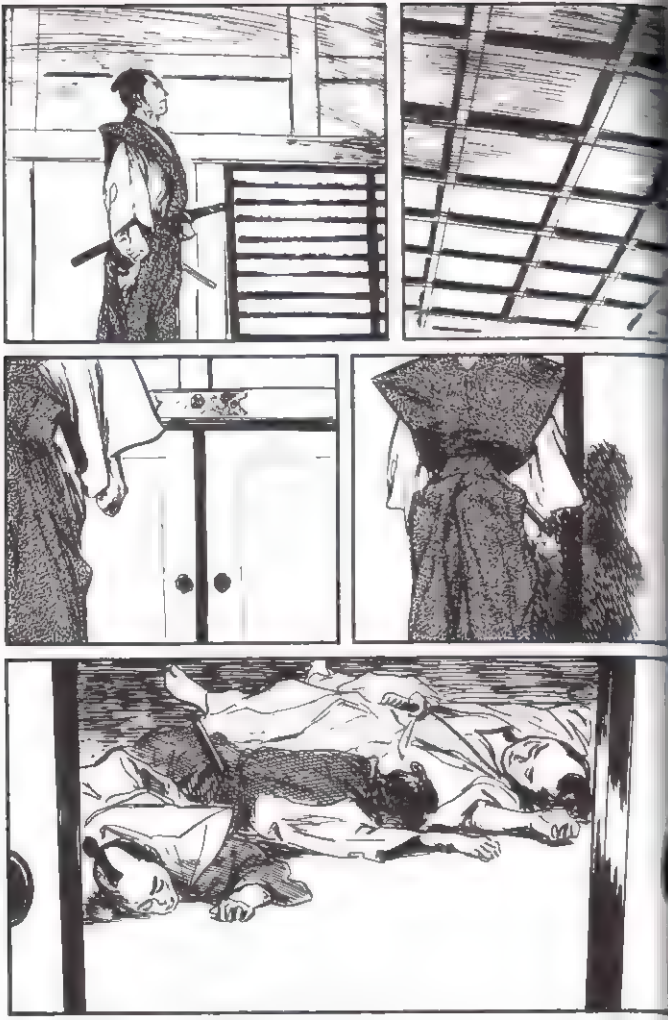
THAT'S... RIGHT HEH. FORGOT ABOUT THAT
Y-YES! I DID THAT! BUT THERE'S MORE!
ALL KINDS OF EVIDENCE. I HAVE IT ALL!
AND IT'S ALL YOURS! JUST . HELP ME!
MY APOLOGIES
THE PALANQUIN IS COMING. . ANY MINUTE!

D-DON'T LET THEM TAKE ME!
YAIIEE!

WHOO
YOU
OWE
ME!!
I...I NEVER TOLD OUR LORD THAT YOU WERE IN EDO! THE HATCHŌ STRAND I BOUGHT YOU TIME!

THEY'D HAVE BEEN ON YOU LIKE A SWARM OF FLIES!
AND AFTER YOU SAW RETSUDŌ. DEATH!
YOU OWE ME, YOU BASTARD!
GUARDS!!
GUARDS!!
LONE WOLF'S IN THE CASTLE!!


ASTER!
AM
OWN!
IT'S LONE WOLF! ŌGAMI ITTŌ! HE'S HERE!!
ARREST HIM!!
I'M SURE IT WAS A DREAM, SIR.
MASTER, THE PALANQUIN'S HERE.
THE... PALANQUIN...?!

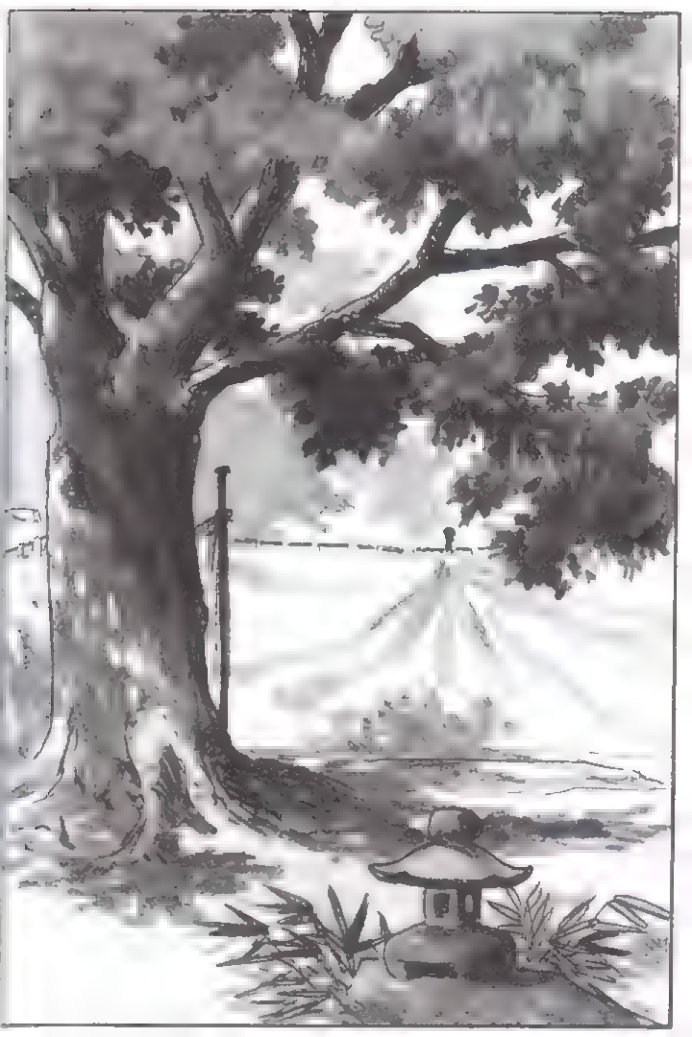


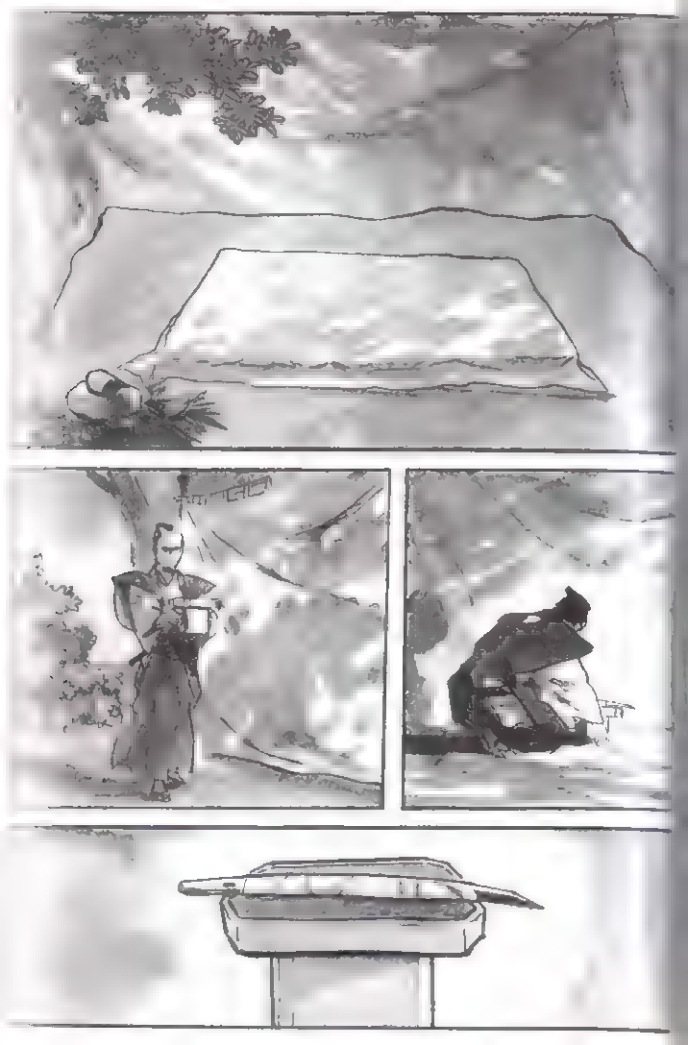
RETSUDŌ.
ITTŌ.
EH?

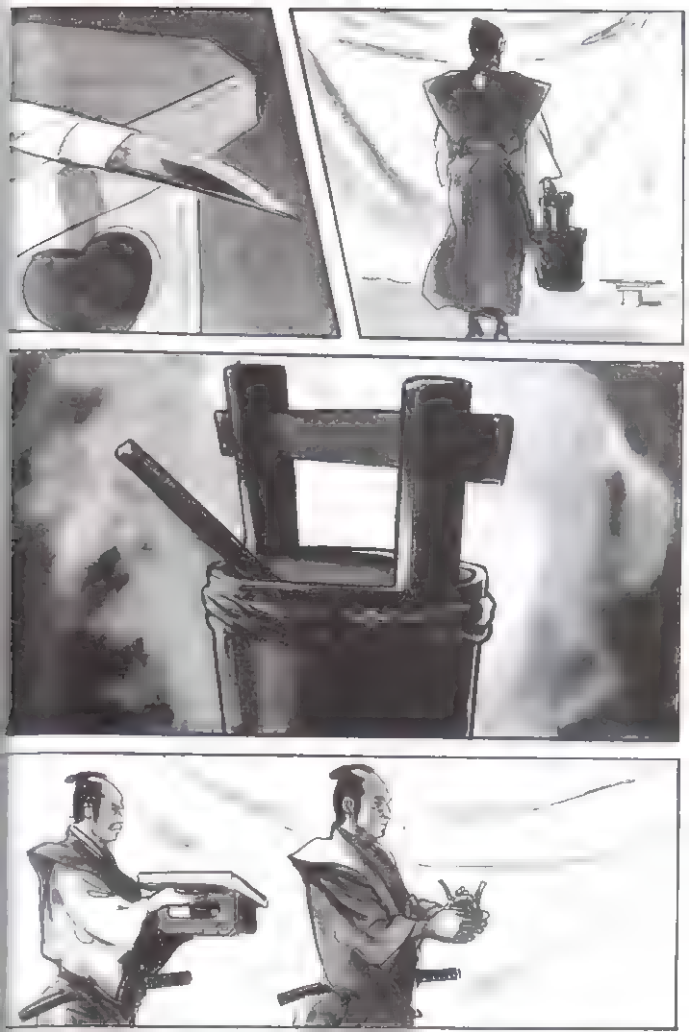
THANK YOU
I'M MYSELF AGAIN
YOU KILLED THE BRASS?
I DID
WITHOUT ME, NO YAGYŪ NO SHŌGUN
HEH?
SOON I CAN'T REBUILD THE YAGYŪ UNTIL YOU'RE DEAD SO BE WARNED! I'VE SUMMONED ALL THE BRASS FROM ACROSS THE LAND
MY SPIRIT IS BY THE HATCHŌ
AND MINE WAIT FOR ME!

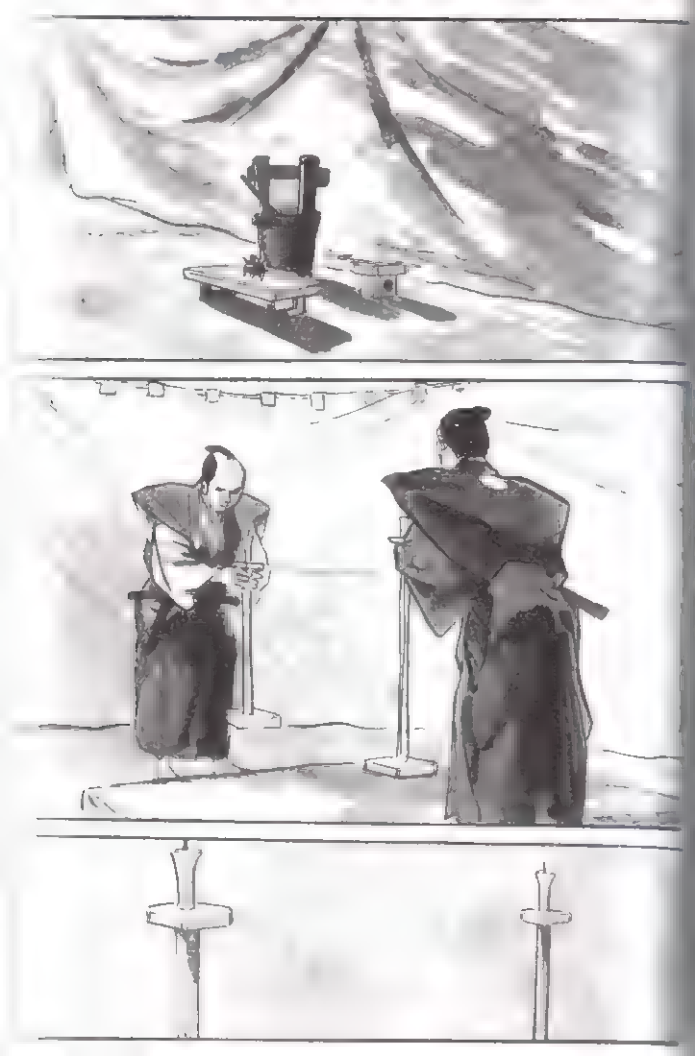
the hundred and thirty-second

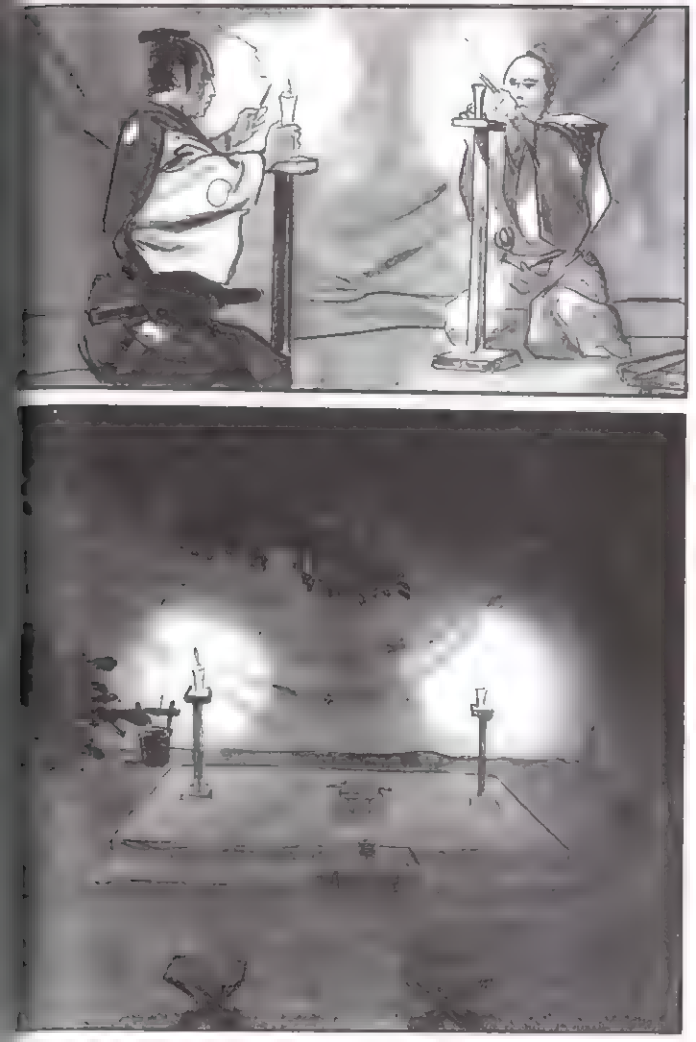
Scarlet Summer, Silver Fall

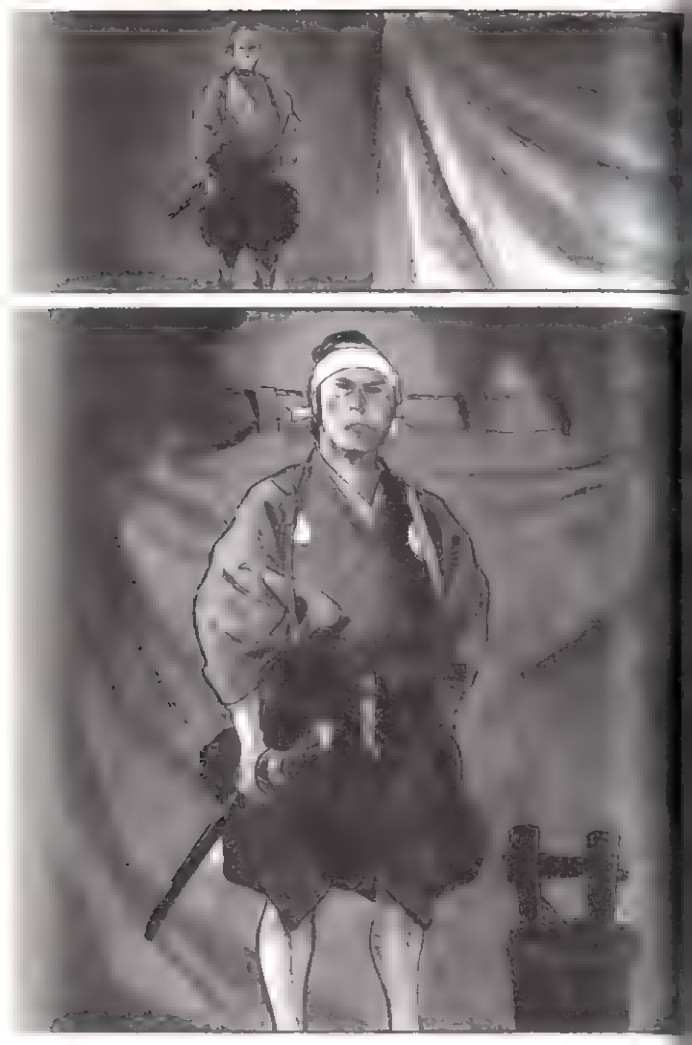


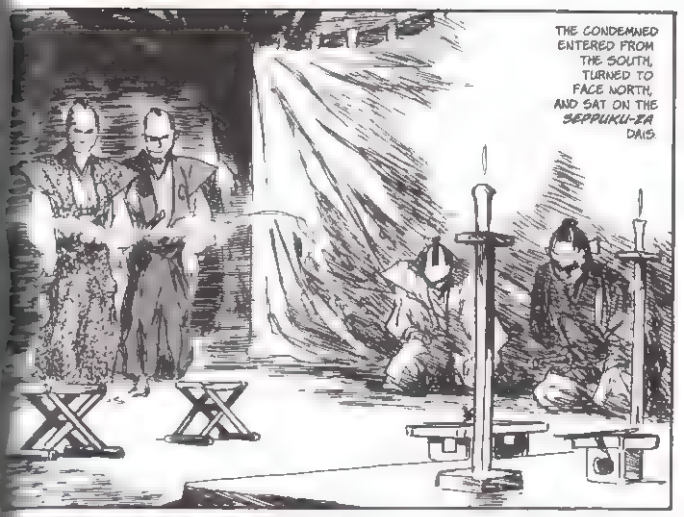




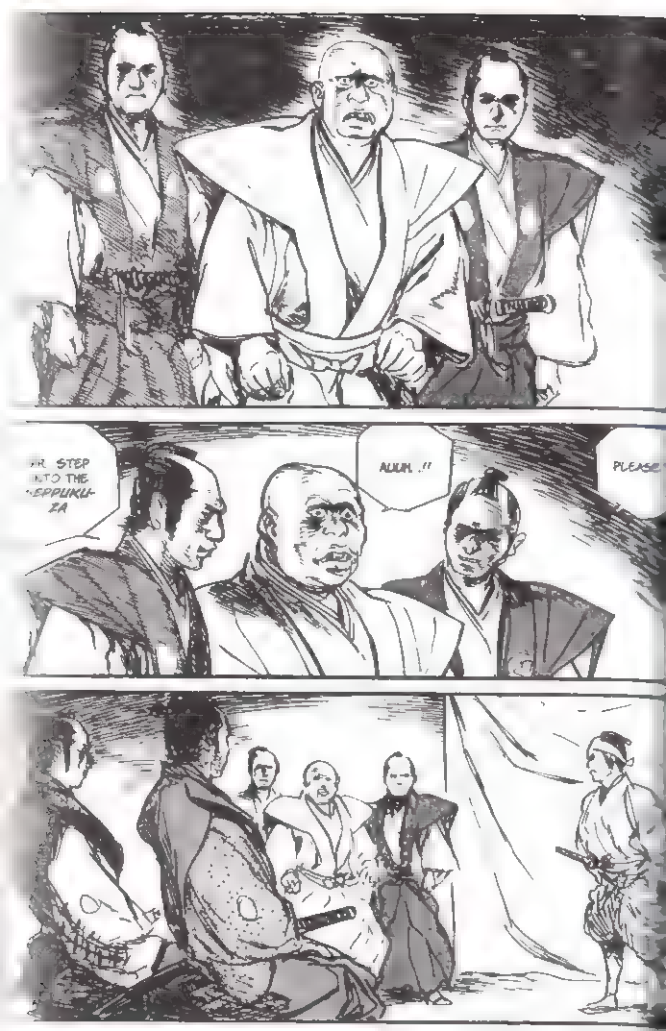


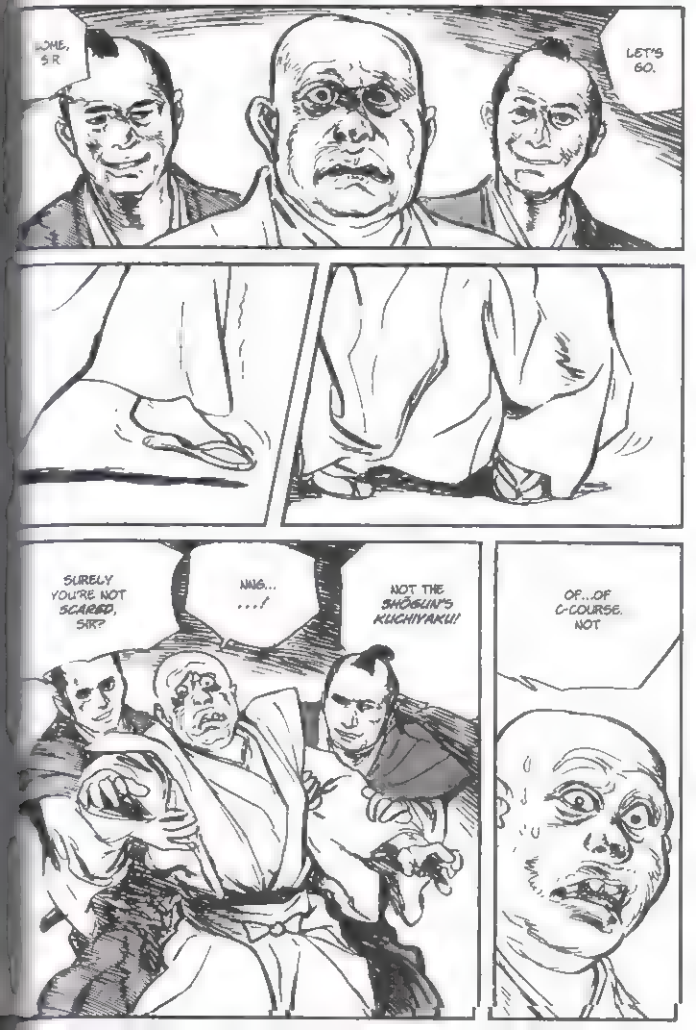


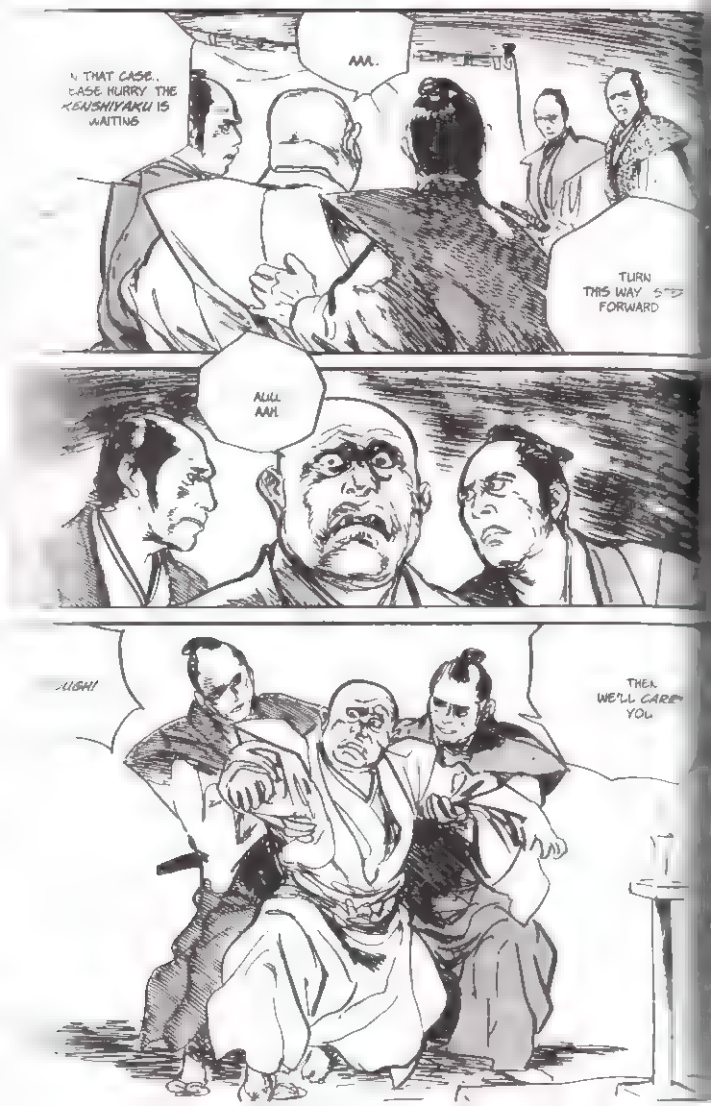



THE CONDEMNED ENTERED FROM THE SOUTH, TURNED TO FACE NORTH, AND SAT ON THE SEPPUKU-ZA DAIS

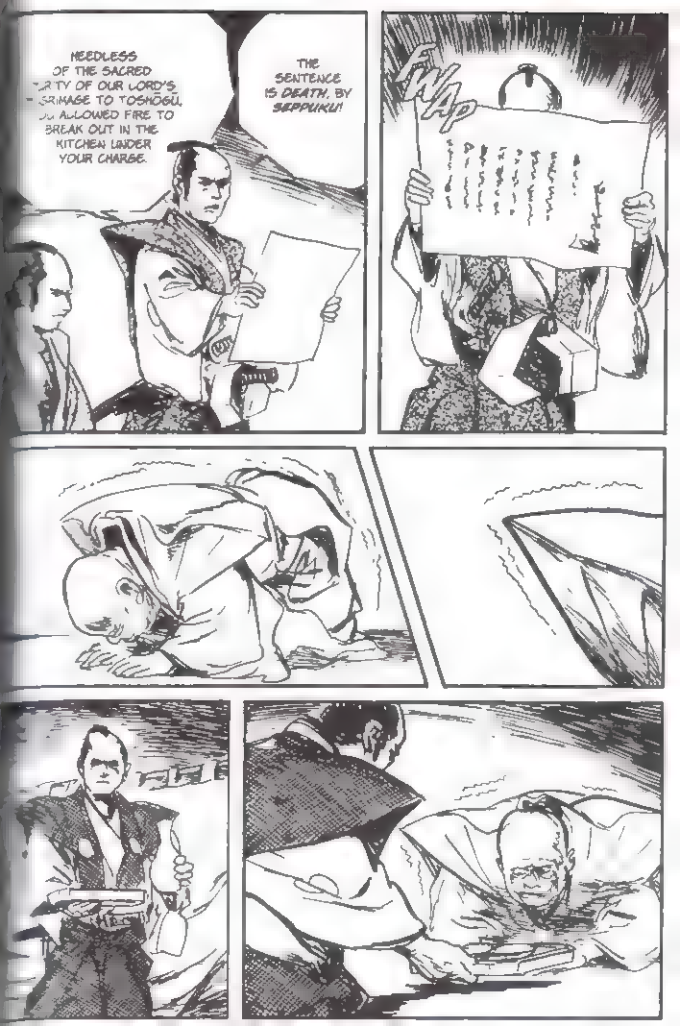
THE RITE WAS USUALLY PERFORMED BETWEEN DUSK AND DARK.


...R. STEP INTO THE SEPPUKU-ZA
AUUM..!!
PLEASE


COME, SIR
LET'S GO.
SURELY YOU'RE NOT SCARED, SIR?
NNG... ...!
NOT THE SHŌGUN'S KUCHIYAKU!!
OF...OF C-COURSE. NOT


N THAT CASE..
EASE HURRY THE
KENSHIYAKU IS
AITING
AH..
TURN
THIS WAY
FORWARD
AUU.
AAH
USH!
THEN
WE'LL CARRY
YOU

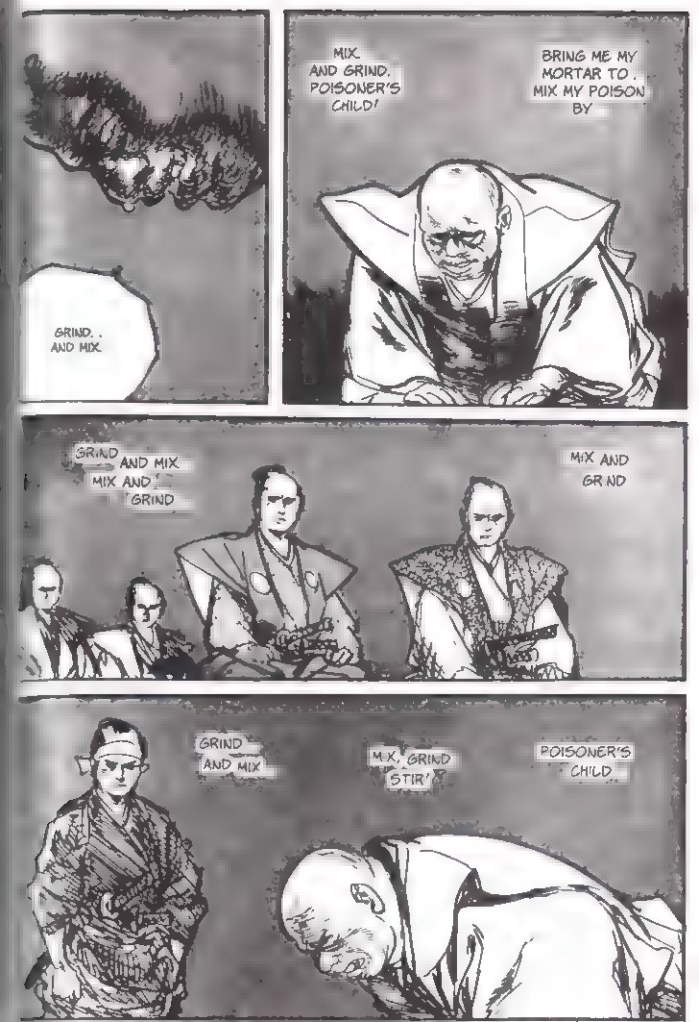
HEAR OUR LORD'S WILL!
ABE TANOSHI, HEAD OF THE SERVERS AND POISON TASTERS OF EDO CASTLE!

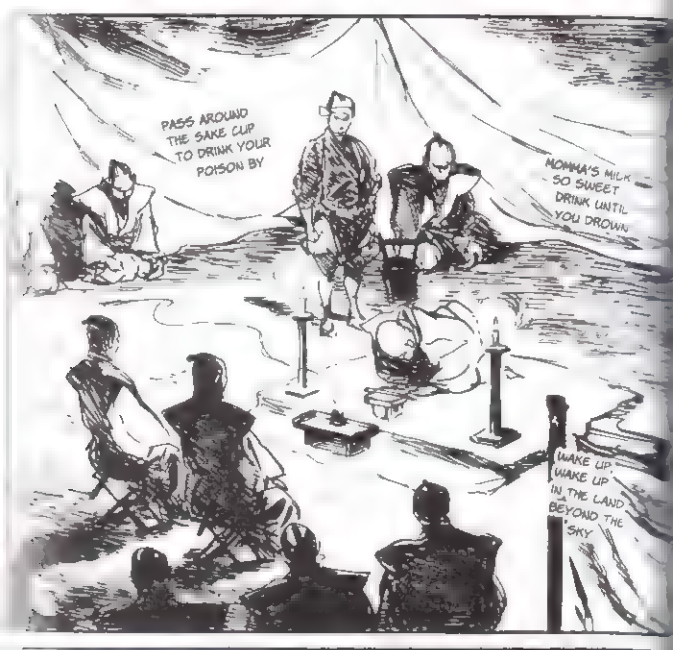

NEEDLESS OF THE SACRED
TY OF OUR LORD'S
RIMAGE TO TOSHOGU.
ED FIRE TO
BREAK OUT IN THE
KITCHEN UNDER
YOUR CHARGE.
THE SENTENCE IS DEATH, BY SEPPUKU!
WAP

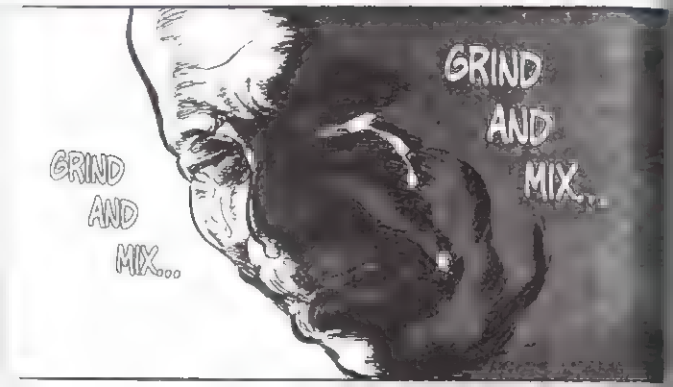
ABE-SAMA
PLEASE RAISE YOUR HEAD
PLEASE RAISE YOUR HEAD
PLEASE, TAKE THE CUP
KYUU
EMPTY THE CUP IN TWO SIPS THAT'S THE WAY

KSH
YES, SIR!
TAKE IT AWAY!
THIS IS PATHETIC, ABE TANOSHI

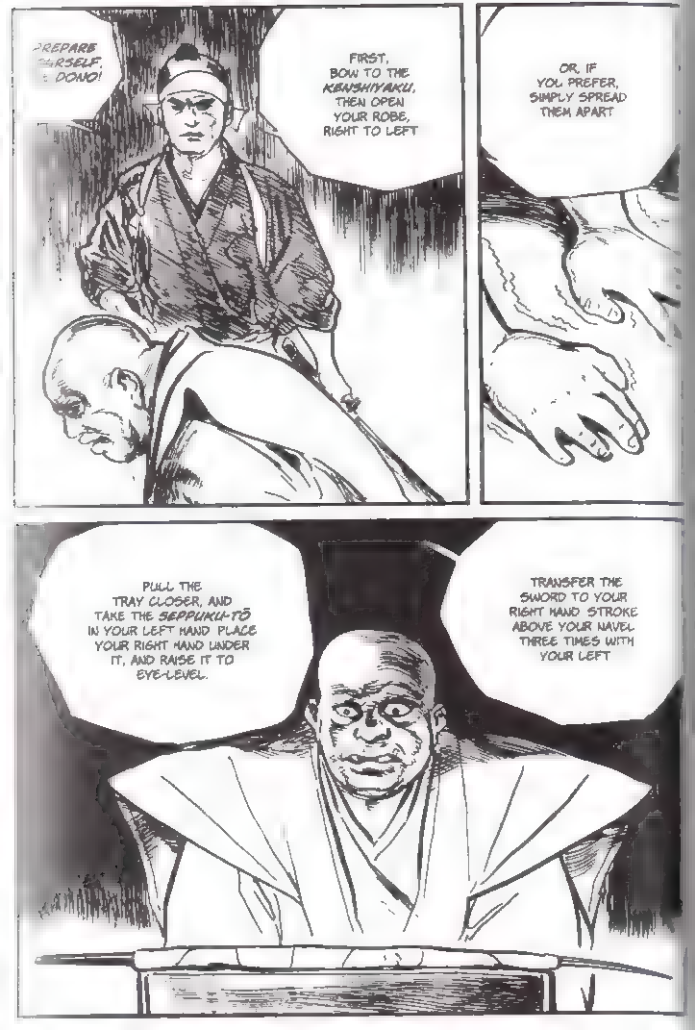
ARE YOU NOT ASHAMED OF SUCH UNMANLY CONDUCT?!
B-BUT. I.. I'M NOT A BUSHI!! NEVER.. WANTED TO BE A BUSHI!...
YOU ARE SAMURAI!!
LET IT PASS, SIR.
HMPH.
IF YOU HAVE ANY LAST WORDS OR TESTAMENT. PERHAPS A PARTING POEM..
NNG.. RRGH..


GRIND. . AND MIX.
MIX. AND GRIND. POISONER'S CHILD!
BRING ME MY MORTAR TO . MIX MY POISON BY
GRIND AND MIX MIX AND GRIND
MIX AND GRND
GRIND AND MIX
MIX, GRIND STIR'
POISONER'S CHILD


PASS AROUND THE SAKE CUP TO DRINK YOUR POISON BY
MOMMA'S MILK SO SWEET DRINK UNTIL YOU DROWN
WAKE UP WAKE UP IN THE LAND BEYOND THE SKY


GRIND AND MIX...
GRIND AND MIX...

PITIFUL INDEED
I'LL BE YOUR SECOND
NOW PREPARE YOURSELF!
RRK!
AAH!

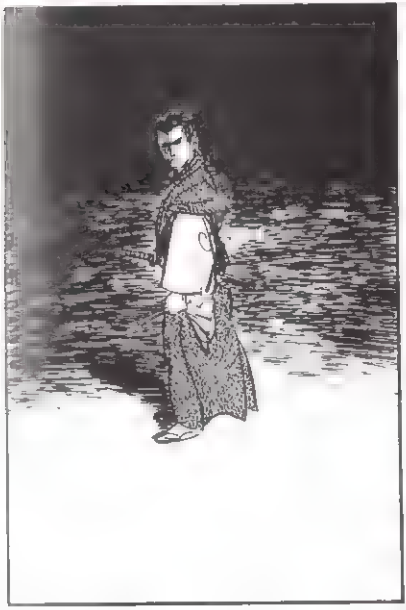

PREPARE YOURSELF, DONO!
FIRST, BOW TO THE KENSHIYAKU, THEN OPEN YOUR ROBE, RIGHT TO LEFT
OR, IF YOU PREFER, SIMPLY SPREAD THEM APART
PULL THE TRAY CLOSER, AND TAKE THE SEPPUKU-TŌ IN YOUR LEFT HAND PLACE YOUR RIGHT HAND UNDER IT, AND RAISE IT TO EYE-LEVEL.
TRANSFER THE SWORD TO YOUR RIGHT HAND STROKE ABOVE YOUR NAVEL THREE TIMES WITH YOUR LEFT

CALM YOUR SPIRIT. THEN THRUST
UNDERSTAND?
ABE-DONO...?!
BEGIN!
YOUR OTHER HAND

SHAAK

EEYAH!
NOOOOO!
SAVE ME!!
SOMEBODY!!

NOOOO!
HELLP! ME!!
DON'T KILL
THIS IS A DISGRACE!
SEIZE HIM! HOLD HIM DOWN AND CUT HIM OPEN!



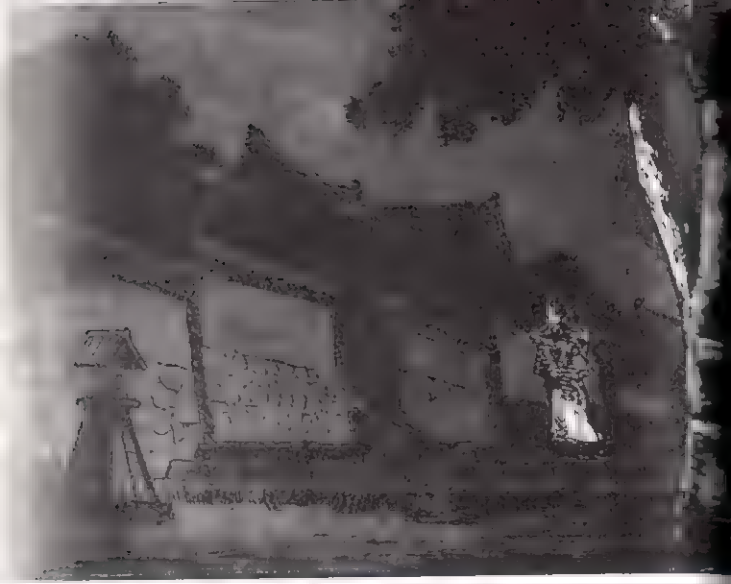
AHHH!

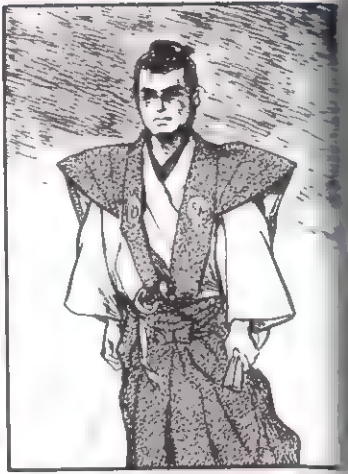
NOOOO!

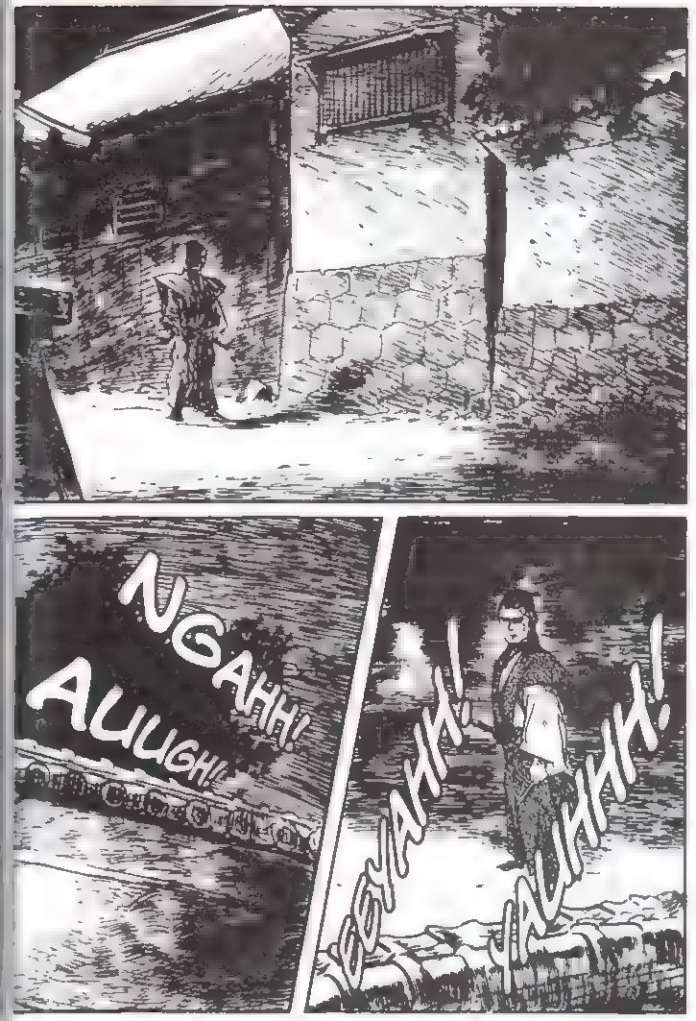
NGAHH!

YAIEE!
GHRRK!

AUGH!
NGYAHHH!
GGAAAH!






NGAHH!
AUUGH!
AUHHH!

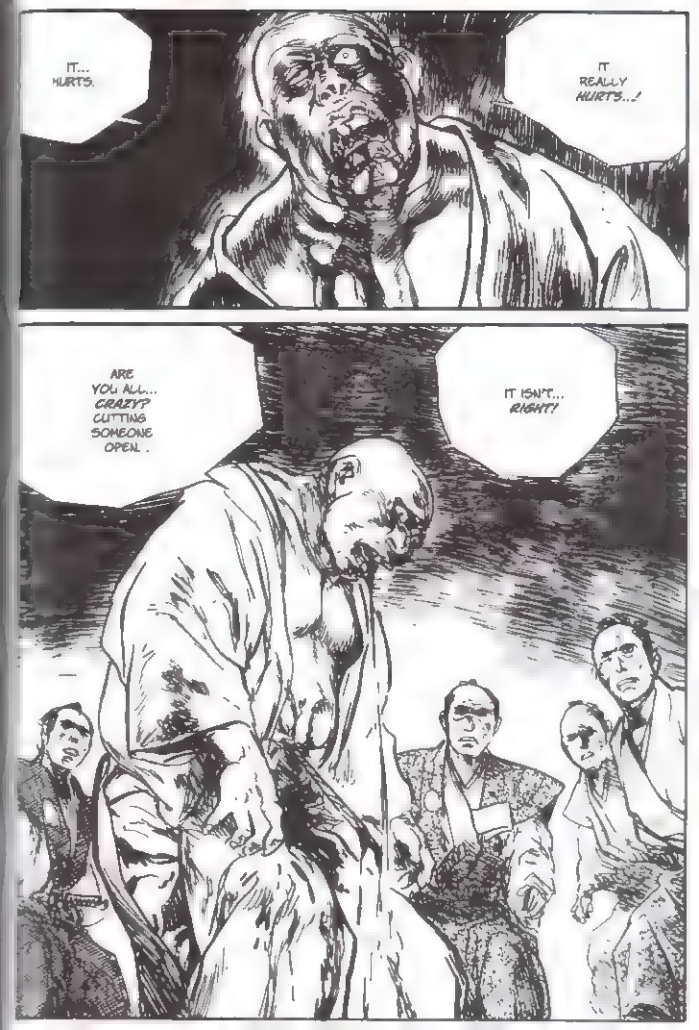
EEEYAAA!
GRUNT

GYAAAHH!

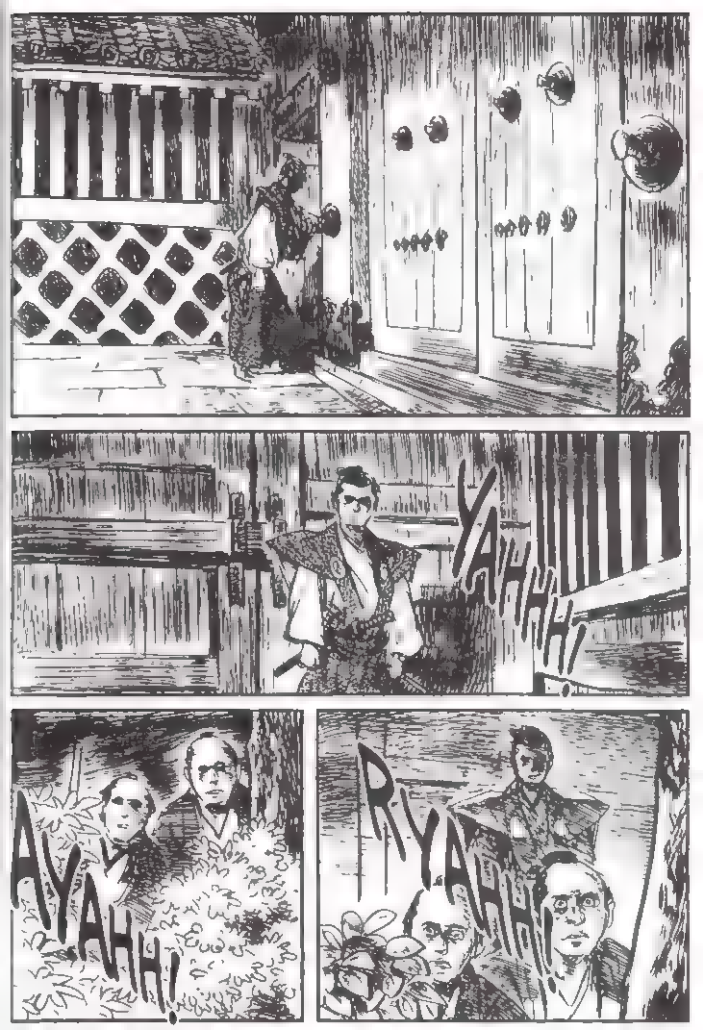
AGGGHH
YAAAA!
KNGH

AAH!!
HYAHH!
UGAHHH!
HRNGGGH!
HELP!!

HLLGK!


IT...
HURTS.
IT
REALLY
HURTS...!
ARE
YOU ALL...
CRAZY?
CUTTING
SOMEONE
OPEN.
IT ISN'T...
RIGHT!

K-KILL HIM!
UNG UNG
RRRAGH!
MY BODY'S BURNING... SO HOT INSIDE!


YAHHH!
AYAHH!
RIYAHH!

I SAID KILL HIM!
CUT HIM DOWN!
GIOH!
SKSSA
HYAHH!
YAGHH!

YOHH!
IGYAAH!
URRG!
NAFF !

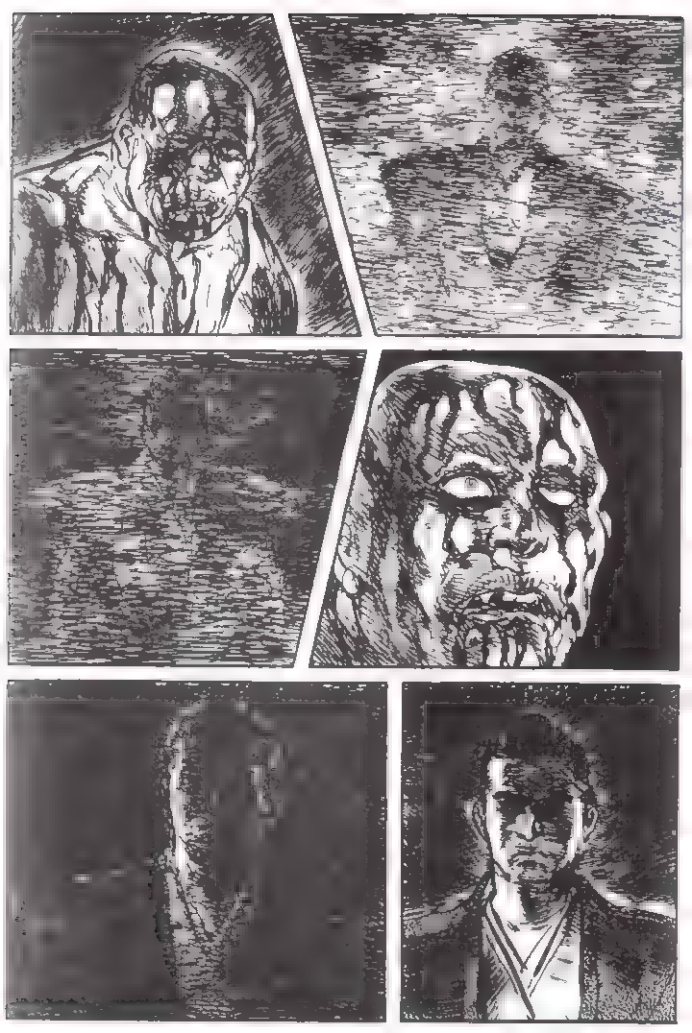
RYAHH!
GUSH
HRGK
YA HA HA!
HNG!
T-TAKE THAT!
I'LL KILL YOU
ALL!
SKSH
NGYAHH!
CRRK

NNG.
HNFF
HANH

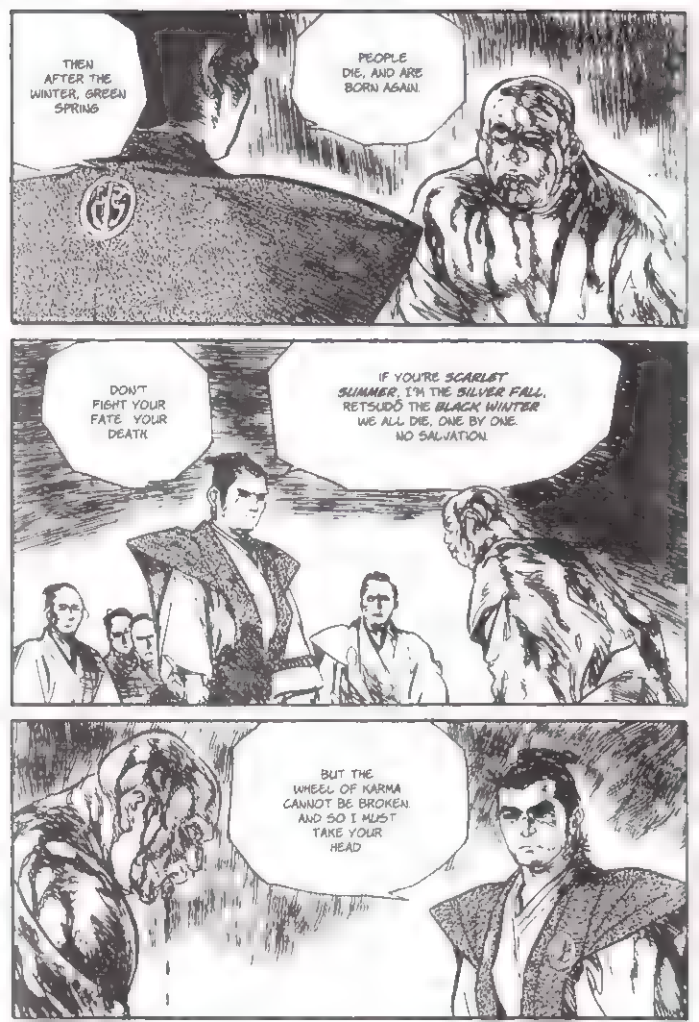
S STOP!
K-KILL HIM!
HFF HAHH!
SPIT
PTEH!

DO IT!
ATTACK!
SKSSH

AUGHK!
GCHUK



I..ITTŌ...?!
TIME FLOWS. SEASONS TURN.
SCARLET
SUMMER SILVER
FALL BLACK
WINTER

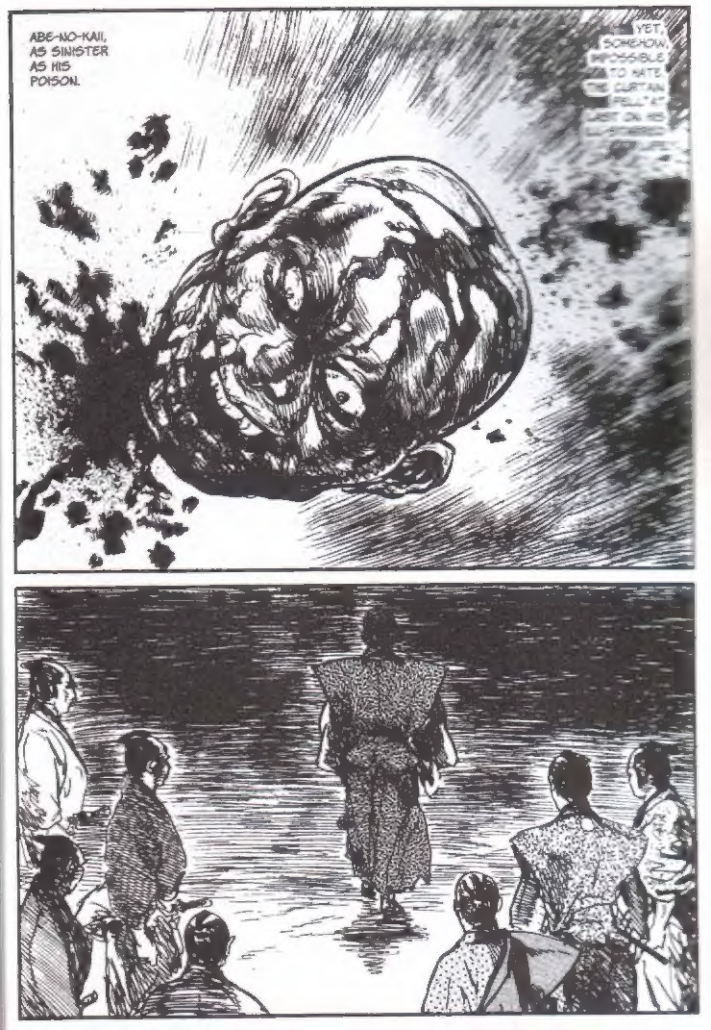

THEN AFTER THE WINTER, GREEN SPRING
PEOPLE DIE, AND ARE BORN AGAIN.
DON'T FIGHT YOUR FATE YOUR DEATH.
IF YOU'RE SCARLET SUMMER, I'M THE SILVER FALL, RETSUDŌ THE BLACK WINTER WE ALL DIE, ONE BY ONE. NO SALVATION.
BUT THE WHEEL OF KARMA CANNOT BE BROKEN AND SO I MUST TAKE YOUR HEAD

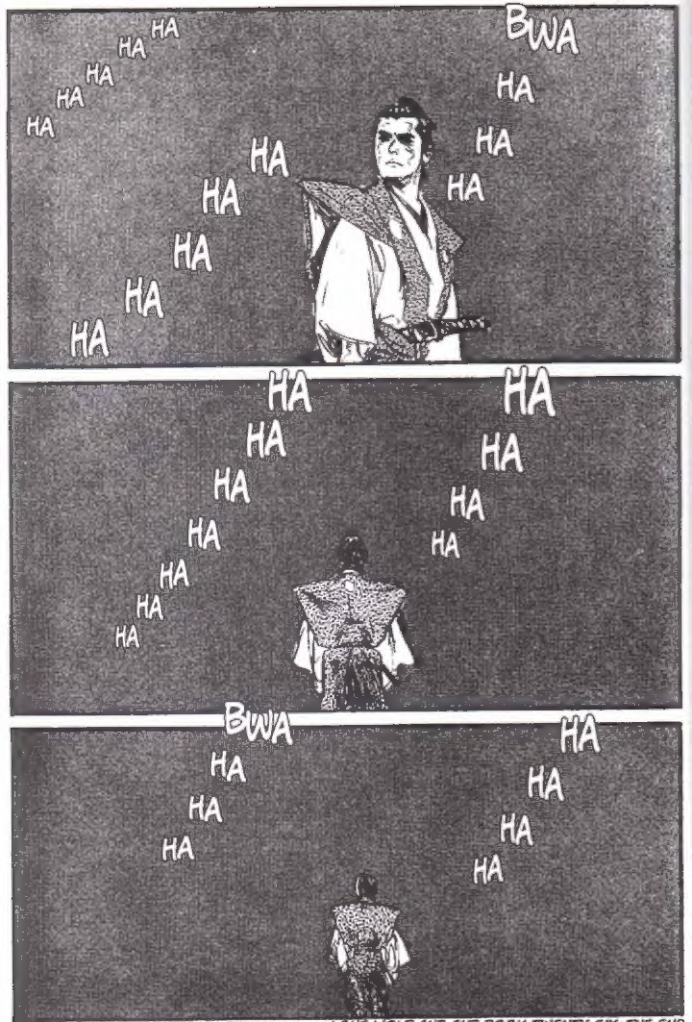
SCARLET.
SILVER.
BLACK.
HEH
HEH
KOFF
HKK

IN THE CYCLE OF REBIRTH... ŌGAMI ITTŌ GETS MY HEAD?
HA HA HA HA
BWAH HAH HAH! INTERESTING!
VERY.. INTERESTING.

RETSUDŌ SCHEMES, ITTŌ CHOPS.
RIGHT. SUMMER'S OVER... YOU'RE NEXT. AUTUMN... THEN WINTER.
AT LAST, ABE-NO-KAII FELT NO FEAR.
HE WHO COULD NEVER BE A *BUSHI* HAD BUTCHERED THREE ARMED *SAMURAI* WITH HIS OWN HANDS. HE FELT A PROFOUND SATISFACTION, VERGING ON JOY. SCARLET SUMMER... SILVER FALL... BLACK WINTER. THERE HE WAS—RANKED ALONGSIDE ITTŌ AND RETSUDŌ.
BWEH
HEH
HEH
HA
HA
HA

FOR HIS SECOND, ŌGAMI ITTŌ... KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN!.
WHSSH
HAHAHAHAHA
THE MAN WHO COULD BE NO BUSHI, DISPATCHED BY THE LAST TRUE BUSHI'S BLADE.


ABE-NO-KAII,
AS SINISTER
AS HIS
POISON.
YET,
SOMEHOW,
IMPOSSIBLE
TO HATE.
THE CURTAIN
FELL AT
JUST ON HIS


HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
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BWA
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